



A SELECTION OF ONE-ACT PLAYS

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BIRDS OF A FEATHER
A WELSH WAYSIDE COMEDY IN ONE ACT
By J. O. FRANCIS



CHARACTERS

TWM TINKER

DICKY BACH DWL

JENKINS THE KEEPER

THE BISHOP OF MID-WALES

SCENE. *A roadside in rural Wales.*

TIME. *About ten o'clock at night.*

WELSH EXPRESSIONS IN THE PLAY

Twm = "Tom." Dicky Bach Dwl = "Daft [little] Dicky."
Fawch = "the deuce." *mawredd* = "goodness." *fach* = "little"
(as term of endearment). *darro* = "dash it." *iechyd da, iachi*
da = "good health." *ach y fi*, an expression of disgust.



BIRDS OF A FEATHER

Throughout the play the stage directions are to be taken from the view-point of an audience.

The foreground of the stage is a country road. At the back are trees in summer foliage. Between the trees and the road is a low grassy bank, which, half-way across the stage, is broken by a gap from which a pathway runs through the trees to the river near by. Moonlight is seen amidst the trees and in the further parts of the stage.

There is a wood-fire in the foreground. To the right and to the left of the fire are boxes, both serving as seats. Near by is a third box, used as a store-table. On it are plates, knives, forks, a couple of tin drinking-mugs, packets of condiments, and a hurricane lamp. On the ground, near the fire, is another hurricane lamp; also a frying-pan containing steak and onions. This part of the stage is lit by the two lamps and the glow of the fire.

The rise of the curtain shows TWM TINKER seated upon the box to the right, eating his supper with a plate balanced on his knees. TWM is a middle-aged man, weather-beaten and poorly clad. From his doleful examination of his empty cup it is clear that his meal lacks drink. Putting down the cup with a sigh of resignation, he cleans his plate by wiping it round with a handful of grass from the bank and polishes it with some paper. Then, lighting his pipe, he settles down for an after-supper smoke.

DICKY BACH DWL *begins to sing on the road to the left.*

TWM. Hullo, Dicky!

DICKY [*without*]. Hullo, Twm!

TWM. Got the beer?

DICKY. Yes.

TWM. Then hurry up, my boy, hurry up!

[DICKY BACH DWL *comes in from the left, carrying a loaf of bread and a gallon jar. He is a young fellow dressed in ragged rustic clothing, with a battered soft hat set on his mop of unkempt hair. His facial expression shows a mind a little awry. There is, however, nothing unpleasant about him, but, rather, something pitiful and appealing.*

DICKY [*sniffing the air*]. Jawch, Twm, there's a grand smell on that steak and onions.

TWM. Your share is in the frying-pan. Hand over that jar, Dicky.

[DICKY *puts the loaf with the other stores and gives the jar to TWm, who pours out a mugful of ale and drinks with large appreciation. DICKY holds the frying-pan over the fire, enjoying the odour.*

DICKY. A-a-h! H'm! Lovely! Have you set the night-lines, Twm?

TWM. Yes. [*With a gesture towards the back of the stage*] They're tied to that willow-tree at the bottom end o' the pool. [*A dog whimpers on the road to the right.*

DICKY [*concerned*]. There's the little bitch crying.

TWM. Yes. I put her in the cart out o' the way. If Jenkins the Keeper or Powell the Policeman should come along it's best they don't see the dog.

DICKY [*consolingly, as if to a fellow-creature*]. Lie you still, Floss fach. It will be safer for us. [*The dog begins to bark happily, hearing his voice.*] Quiet! [*The dog stops at once.*] Where's the donkey?

TWM. I tethered him down by the bridge. Give him a call to be sure he's there.

DICKY [*calling on a special note*]. Ned-dy!

[*The donkey brays a friendly reply from the right.*]

TWM. Hark at him—yes, answering you back like a Christian in a pair of trousers. The understanding you've got for animals—well, boy, it's beyond me quite.

DICKY [*beginning to transfer the viands from the frying-pan to his plate*]. Aay, and I've got a pretty tidy understanding for a bit o' steak and onions, too.

TWM. Here—steady, my lad! Take half and leave half.

DICKY [*reluctant*]. Leave?

TWM. Yes, just for safety. You know the character we've got for poaching. Well, if anybody dangerous comes along—[*suiting the action to the word*] then I pop the frying-pan over the fire—like this—and here we are, Twm Tinker and Dicky Bach Dwl, a proper picture o' two law-abiding tinkers eating their bit of honest supper.

DICKY [*doubtful*]. Well, p'raps people would believe it. They might.

[*The raucous note of a corncrake is heard from the distance on the left.*]

TWM. The old corncrake there doesn't seem to think much of it either. Did you see Price when you fetched the beer?



DICKY. Yes. [*Producing a note*] Oh, he asked me to give you this!

TWM. About that salmon, I expect. [*Reading by the light of one of the lamps*] "Castle Hotel, Pontewyn. Private and Confidential. Dear Twm Tinker, this is to let you know that everything is arranged now about the luncheon-party that Mr. Venerbey-Jones is giving to-morrow to the clergymen who are coming for the opening of the new schoolroom at St. David's Church." [*With a fierce air of grievance*] Venerbey-Jones? I wish that bunch o' parsons would give him a lunch—and begin by pouring half a pint o' prussic acid down the old devil's throat!

DICKY. Hear, hear, Twm! I've only got three-ha'pence, but I'd pay it willing just to hold the bottle to his lips.

TWM [*reading again*]. "The party will be given here in this hotel, so please don't forget that I am relying on you for a salmon and will pay you tenpence a pound for it. Sincerely yours, Robert Price."

DICKY. Tenpence a pound? Jawch, Twm, there's money for you!

TWM [*putting the letter in his pocket*]. I'll keep this in case o' dispute. We promised him a salmon, Dicky, and a salmon he shall have. This pool o' Venerbey-Jones's has always got the pick o' the river. [*Pointing away*] Look, Dicky. There's banks o' cloud coming up. Good! We shall have a bit o' dark for the water. The wind's gone round sou'-west. [*There is a rustling in the trees.*]

DICKY. Aay, sou'-west. D'you hear her? A grand wind she is, Twm—a dark old wind. Come on, wind. Send up the clouds. That's right—up and up, to shut the

eyes o' the moon. Let's go to the river, Twm. I can't wait any longer.

TWM. Yes. We'd better get ready. Swaller down your vit'ls, Dicky.

DICKY [*hastily polishing off his supper*]. I'm swaller-ing. Twm. I'm swallering. Have you got the things to make a torch?

TWM. Yes. I hid them behind this bank. [*Producing the articles*] Stick, rag, paraffin-oil. [*Producing a trident*] And here's my spear.

DICKY [*suddenly tense*]. H'sh!

[*He bends forward listening.*]

TWM. What is it?

DICKY. Footsteps.

TWM. Where?

DICKY [*pointing to the left*]. In the wood. Twm, it's Jenkins the Keeper.

TWM. Him? Mawredd Moses! Let's get these out o' sight. [*He hides the poaching implements.*] Tell the little bitch to lie still.

DICKY. Right. [*He whistles a low warning note.*]

TWM. Seems to me, Dicky, you can smell a keeper or a policeman a mile off. Where's that blessed frying-pan? Ah! [*He picks up the frying-pan and sits down, holding it over the fire.*] Sit down, Dicky, and put on a look as mild as milk.

[*Sitting peacefully by the fire, they compose their faces to an expression of seraphic virtue.*]

DICKY [*whispering*]. Here he is.

TWM [*loudly*]. Yes, Dicky, you're quite right. Davies Ty Isha ought to have offered more than sixpence for mending that bucket.

[JENKINS THE KEEPER comes in from the left. He is a stalwart, middle-aged man, dressed in clothes appropriate to his calling.]

TWM [*with a start of pretended surprise*]. Oh, Jenkins the Keeper! Good evening, Jenkins.

DICKY. Good evening, Mister Jenkins.

TWM [*genially*]. Taking a stroll after supper?

JENKINS. I don't want any soft soap from you two. What are you doing here, Twm Tinker?

TWM. Frying steak and onions.

JENKINS. Whose onions, I wonder?

TWM [*angrily*]. Whose onions? My onions. Dicky's onions. *Our* onions!

JENKINS [*sarcastically*]. Indeed!

TWM. What d'you mean, Jenkins? What are you hinting at?

JENKINS. I'm not hinting at anything. What I've got to say I'm going to say straight out: I want to see you and this Dicky Bach Dwl off Mr. Venerbey-Jones's land.

TWM. Who's on Venerbey-Jones's land?

DICKY. Aay, who's on it?

TWM. Is this the public road, or is it not?

JENKINS. Public road it may be; but the land on either side of it is Mr. Venerbey-Jones's land. The game on it is Mr. Venerbey-Jones's game.

TWM. That's as may be.

JENKINS. The fish for a mile and a half of that river are Mr. Venerbey-Jones's fish.

TWM. So you say.

JENKINS. Yes, on this estate, fur, fin, and feather, everything is Mr. Venerbey-Jones's. And don't you forget it.

TWM. I know what this means, Jenkins. That boss o' yours has been complaining that you haven't got enough pluck for your job.

JENKINS. What?

TWM. Oh, yes—I've heard! So you're beginning to stir things up by persecuting two peaceful, hardworking tinkers.

JENKINS. Yes, a bright pair of beauties you are. The police don't know one-tenth of the mischief you do—sleeping out in that cart like a lot of thieving gipsies.

TWM [*highly indignant*]. Gipsies? Gipsies, you say?

DICKY. Too bad, Twm. And you a Calvinistic Methodist, too.

JENKINS. In the workhouse you ought to be, you young vagabond.

DICKY. No. No walls for me—never.

JENKINS. And as for you, Twm Tinker, your proper place is the county gaol—and a great pleasure to me it will be to get you there.

TWM. You never will, Jenkins, though you've been trying hard for twenty years.

JENKINS. I'll have you one of these days—the pair of you. And now, before I go home, I want to see you off this estate.

TWM. We'll move from this spot just when we like, Jenkins, and not a moment sooner.

DICKY. Not a moment, Twm.

TWM. If anybody had better be moving, it's you, Jenkins, for fear I should happen to let fly with this frying-pan.

JENKINS. Well, remember: I've told you.

TWM. Thank you for nothing, Jenkins. Good night and sweet repose to you.

JENKINS. Trash—rodneys—pah!

[He goes away to the left.]

DICKY *[watching JENKINS go]*. If there's one thing on earth worse than a weasel it's a keeper.

TWM. We promised a salmon to Price—Jenkins or no Jenkins.

DICKY. He said he was going home. H'sh! Yes—he's walking back through the wood. Come on, Twm. Let's chance it. I can't wait now. Don't you feel the old river drawing you—aay, drawing and drawing? The moon's going, Twm.

TWM. Very well, we'll chance it. I'll get the things out again.

[He produces the poaching-tackle. The moonlight begins to fade into darkness as the clouds cover the sky.]

DICKY *[moving to and fro excitedly and laughing with delight]*. Ha, ha, ha! So long, old Man in the Moon. Good-bye, you little white stars. And, if you should happen to be peeping, I hope you won't see anything short of a sixteen-pounder. Ha, ha! Ho, ho!

TWM *[giving the things to DICKY]*. Here you are—stick, rag, paraffin-oil. Make yourself a torch.

[TWM practises a few movements with his spear, while DICKY improvises a torch by wrapping the rag round the end of the stick.]

DICKY [*pouring oil over the rag*]. Now the paraffin.

TWM. Got matches?

DICKY [*rattling a match-box*]. Yes, plenty.

TWM. Good.

DICKY. Ha, ha, ha! Spear and torch once again—*aay*, this is the time when I'm happy. Happy? Darro, Twm—I can't tell you. It's—it's—oh, it's like as if there's a lot o' little birds all singing inside me. [*Dancing a few steps*] I can't keep still—no, not I. [*Suddenly downcast*] But, Twm—that talk o' me being put in the workhouse—it comes over me something dreadful on times. If I was in the workhouse, Twm, and somebody was to come to me on a night like this and whisper the word 'salmons'—only just whisper it—oh, mawredd, Twm, I think I'd lie down and die broken-hearted!

TWM. Well, my lad, let's hope we're neither of us in gaol before to-morrow's breakfast. [*Moving towards the back of the stage*] Come along.

DICKY [*turning to the right*]. Wait. There's somebody else coming now.

TWM. Damn the people! Isn't a man ever to have peace to get on with his business? [*Once again he puts the poaching-tackle into hiding.*] Where's that frying-pan? [*He resumes his former position at the fire.*] Who is it this time, Dicky?

DICKY [*listening*]. I don't know that step. It's a stranger. [*He peers into the darkness.*] *Aay*, there he is. Jawch, Twm, it's a curate!

TWM. Curate?

DICKY. Aay, with a top-hat and leggings on him.

TWM. Curate? At this time o' night? Any danger, I wonder? Sit down, Dicky, and try to look as if it was Sunday.

[They again assume the rôle of blameless tinkers cooking supper by the roadside. To meet the special occasion, TWM begins to hum a Welsh hymn-tune, with which he is but loosely acquainted. DICKY joins in.]

[The BISHOP OF MID-WALES comes in from the right, carrying a suit-case and trudging wearily. He is dressed in episcopal attire, his gaiters being stained with dust. He is a benign, white-haired old gentleman of a very friendly disposition. For a moment he pauses, blinking through and over his glasses in the manner of a very short-sighted person.]

BISHOP. What's this? Ah, yes, thank heaven—humanity at last! Good evening, friends.

TWM *[non-committally]*. Good evening.

DICKY *[touching his forehead]*. Good evening, sir.

BISHOP. Can you tell me, please, if I am anywhere near the vicarage?

TWM. You mean Mr. Owen Matthews's place?

BISHOP. No. Mr. Lewis Pugh's.

TWM. Pugh? But that's in the next valley.

BISHOP *[horrified]*. What?

DICKY. Yes, sir—four miles away.

BISHOP. Four miles? Oh, dear, dear, dear! I can't do it.

DICKY. Lost your way you have, sir?

BISHOP. Yes. I reached Pontewyn on the last train, and I've been wandering about for over two hours. [*Mopping his brow*] I'm quite worn out.

TWM [*putting down the frying-pan, assured that the BISHOP is harmless*]. But didn't anybody meet you at the station?

BISHOP. No. You see, I wrote to my friend Pugh. [*Producing a letter*] But I've just found that I've had the letter in my pocket all the time.

[*The BISHOP's sad plight and his obvious good-nature began to win over TWM and DICKY.*]

DICKY. Twm, p'raps the gentleman would like to sit down?

TWM. Sit you down, mister, and welcome.

BISHOP. Thank you very much. I feel rather faint.

DICKY [*offering his box*]. Here you are, sir. Rest your poor feet. [*The BISHOP sits down with a sigh of relief.*]

BISHOP [*sniffing the air*]. I seem to—— Do I? Or do I not? Yes, a pleasant aroma.

DICKY. It's the frying-pan, sir—steak and onions.

BISHOP [*in a spasm of desire*]. Steak and—did you say steak and onions? [*Sighing longingly*] Oh, dear!

TWM. Two hours' walking, with that heavy bag? [*Suddenly magnanimous*] Dicky, he must have what's left o' the steak and onions.

DICKY [*heartily*]. Aay, Twin, so he must.

BISHOP [*in polite, but feeble demurral*]. No, really—er no. I oughtn't to deprive you of——

TWM. That's all right, sir. We've had our supper. Dicky, pass that plate.

[DICKY holds out a plate on to which TWM tips the contents of the frying-pan.]

DICKY. That's it, Twm, gravy an' all. [*Giving the plate to the Bishop*] There you are, sir. Now, a chunk o' bread.

BISHOP. Thank you. I really am most grateful. The fact is I'm quite famished. [*He begins to eat hungrily.*]

DICKY. Would you like a nice drop o' beer, sir?

BISHOP [*with an anticipatory smile*]. Beer?

TWM [*aside, doubtful as to their guest's views on total abstinence*]. Er—Dicky——

DICKY. That's all right, Twm. Church the gentleman is, not chapel. [*He pours out a mugful of ale.*]

BISHOP. Precisely! The older institution, the more catholic outlook, the more tolerant philosophy. [*Taking the mug from Dicky*] Thank you, my boy. Well, iechyd da!

TWM AND DICKY. Iachi da, sir.

BISHOP [*growing expansive*]. Ah—h'm—excellent! Yes, most refreshing. And now—may I ask your names, my good friends?

TWM. Twm Tinker I'm known as.

DICKY. And Dicky Bach Dwl they're calling me.

BISHOP. Dicky Bach D——? [*Catching TWM's informative gesture towards his head.*] Er, yes—quite so! Well. I shan't forget this little roadside party.

TWM. I wouldn't boast of it, mister, if I was you.

DICKY. No. You see, sir, we've got a bad name—somehow.

BISHOP. A bad name?

DICKY. Yes, for poaching.

TWM [*warningly*]. Er—h'm——

DICKY. Don't be afraid, Twm. You can tell from the gentleman's face there's a kind heart in him.

TWM. P'raps I ought to say one thing to you, sir, as man to man: it won't do you any good as a parson to be seen sitting here, chatting with me and Dicky.

BISHOP. But I enjoy sitting here, chatting with you and Dicky.

DICKY [*surprised*]. Enjoy it, sir?

BISHOP. Yes. I must explain that I've just come straight from a conference at Llandrindod.

DICKY. What do they do at a conf'rence, sir?

BISHOP [*with gloomy recollections*]. Make speeches, my boy—and usually long ones! Admirable people, of course; irreproachable people; people for whom I have the highest respect. But now, after four whole days with the saints, it's quite a pleasant change to sit down and talk to a couple of sinners. [*Looking around*] After the crowded conference it's rather strange to me to be here, just three of us alope.

DICKY. Alone, sir? Oh, no! We ain't alone.

BISHOP [*peering here and there*]. Not alone? But——

DICKY. All round us, sir—they're watching.

BISHOP. Watching?

DICKY. Aay, eyes in the dark.

BISHOP. Eyes in the dark? Dear me!

DICKY. There's rabbits by the score.

BISHOP [*beginning to grow interested*]. Yes, of course—the rabbits.

DICKY [*with a shout*]. Hyp! B-r-r-r! Hop it, rabbits! [*With his low, chuckling laugh*] Now, it's tails up, sir, and



they're all scurrying off, as if the Day o' Judgment had come on 'em sudden. [*A fox barks in the distance on the left.*]

BISHOP. There's a dog.

DICKY. Dog? That's a fox.

BISHOP. Really? A fox?

DICKY. Aay, slipping along the top edge o' that wood—and thinking hard, I expect, o' somebody's chickens.

BISHOP. Eyes in the dark—I never thought of them before. [*Kindling*] This isn't merely pleasant; it's—it's quite exciting. [*The corncrake is heard.*]

DICKY. There's that old corncrake down on the marsh. Very often when he begins there's no hope o' stopping him.

BISHOP. It reminds me of Llandrindod.

DICKY. On that slope there'll be a couple of hedgehogs nosing about for sure; and here in this field o' corn there's the little squeaky fellows.

BISHOP. And who are the little squeaky fellows?

DICKY. The mice, o' course; and they're nibbling, nibbling, nibbling. Aay, I've got a great feeling for them little squeaky fellers. I'm a bit of a nibbler myself.

[*An owl hoots near by.*]

BISHOP. I know what that is: an owl.

DICKY. Yes. [*Calling loudly and clapping his hands*] Look out, all you little fellers. There's owls after you. I like to warn 'em, sir.

BISHOP. Quite right, my boy. [*Concerned and clapping his hands also*] Look out there.

DICKY. Ach y fi, them old owls! They're no better than Jenkins the Keeper and Powell the Policeman.

BISHOP [*a lure beginning to grip him*]. Those watching eyes! The thought of them stirs me—yes, most strangely.

DICKY [*eager and joyous*]. Ha, ha, ha! You feel it too? It's the way o' the night, sir. It's the wind and the dark getting hold of you.

BISHOP [*uneasy under his pleasure*]. Well, something's getting hold of me, that's certain.

DICKY. Ha, ha! Wait you, sir—just wait.

TWM. Curate or not, mister, take care how you listen to Dicky Bach Dwl. There's times when he'd make a gang o' poachers out o' the Twelve Apostles themselves.

DICKY. Are you fond of a bit o' sport, sir?

BISHOP. Sport? Well, I was something of a sportsman up at Oxford.

[DICKY goes to the BISHOP. His silent, swift-footed motion is now, in itself, a fascination. He is aquiver with an eager, joyous stealth, and his voice is low and seductive.

DICKY. P'raps you'd like a bit o' sport in the river to-night?

TWM [*aside, anxiously*]. Dicky, Dicky!

DICKY. But, Twm, don't you understand? He's half one of us already. Listen, sir. I'll just whisper. [*Into the BISHOP's ear*] Twm and me are going after a salmon.

BISHOP. A salmon?

DICKY. Yes, there in Venerbey-Jones's pool. [*Producing the spear and the torch*] Here are the things. [*Offering the spear to the BISHOP*] Now, you take the spear.

BISHOP. But, my boy—

DICKY. It's only pretending. Take it.

BISHOP [*the old Adam waking in him, as he grasps the spear*]. What do I do with it?

DICKY. Suppose we're going into the water.

BISHOP [*his diocese forgotten*]. Right in? Dear me!

DICKY. There's only the torch in the darkness and the big, big shadders all popping about. And you're waiting—like this—h'sh!—as quiet as a stone. And then—there's the salmon.

BISHOP. Yes, the salmon.

DICKY. Just you think of it, curate or not. Can't you picture his nose coming up towards the light?

BISHOP. His nose—yes! And then?

DICKY. Then you lift up the spear—[*showing the movement*—slow and careful, like this.

BISHOP [*imitating the movement*]. Like this? I see. Well?

DICKY [*dropping his voice*]. Up he comes—nearer, nearer. Then you can see his back. It's all shiny in the water. And you take your aim—just behind his head. [*Aloud*] Now! [*With a swift stroke*] Swish! Down comes the spear.

BISHOP [*again imitating*]. Swish!

DICKY [*making another illustrative movement*]. And then, with a twist, you throw him out on the bank.

BISHOP [*with a similar movement*]. You throw him? So!

DICKY. Oh, there's fun it is! Fun, sir? Aay, fuit for the kings o' the world. You'll come along?

BISHOP. I? Well, really, perhaps I—

DICKY. Yes, you must come, if it's only to watch us.

BISHOP. Of course, if it's only to watch—yes. The spear goes this way, you say? [*With the appropriate movement*] Swish!

[*The corncrake is heard again.*]

BISHOP [*suddenly dashed*]. Ah—the voice of conscience and Llandrindod!

DICKY. You're coming with us? You are coming?

BISHOP. No, Dicky, certainly not. [*He puts down the spear.*] How could you suggest such a thing? And to a clergyman of all people.

TWM [*judicially*]. Still, he pretty nearly had you, sir.

DICKY. Trying to show kindness I was. If you won't come after a salmon, sir—well, p'raps you're fond of a feed o' trout?

BISHOP. Trout? Yes, a pleasant dish at breakfast.

DICKY. Twm, those night-lines—fast to the willows, you said? Wait you a minute, sir, if you like trout.

[*He hurries away through the trees at the back.*]

TWM. A tidy little feller is Dicky, sir, though, o' course, he's counted a bit daft in the head.

BISHOP. Daft? And who amongst us shall say that he knows all the ways of God's wisdom? Poor Dicky! I like him—yes, very much.

TWM. He's terrible afraid o' being caught red-handed one o' these nights. There's talk o' putting him in the workhouse. [*Hesitating and uneasy*] O' course, sir, after all he's told you, you know enough now to set the police on our track.

BISHOP. Don't be alarmed, my friend. I know enough to do that for people whose names would surprise you.

[*DICKY comes back, bringing a few trout.*]

DICKY. Here you are, sir. Look at these trout. Beauties they are, sir—fresh off the hook. For you, sir. Take 'em.

BISHOP. I'm afraid they're stolen goods, Dicky.

DICKY. You won't take 'em, sir?

BISHOP. I'd—I'd—er—better not.

TWM. Don't you understand, Dicky? The gentleman is in the Church. Hand me them fish, Dicky. I'll find a good use for 'em.

[He takes the trout and puts them in his pocket.]

DICKY. Excuse me offering 'em, sir. I thought p'raps you wouldn't be so religious on a week-night. Curate you are, sir, o' course?

BISHOP. Well, I was once.

DICKY. You was once? *[Sympathetically]* Did they give you the chuck-out?

BISHOP. Not exactly, Dicky.

TWM. A vicar now, maybe?

BISHOP. I've been a vicar, too.

DICKY. Well, what are you *now*, sir?

BISHOP. At present I'm a bishop.

TWM AND DICKY *[staggered]*. Eh? What?

DICKY. A bishop?

TWM. Well, I'll be d——

BISHOP *[hastily]*. H'm—er—yes. I'm the Bishop of Mid-Wales.

TWM. But a bishop can't go wandering about the roads like a stray cat. Why don't you go to Mr. Venerbey-Jones's, sir? He's the big man in these parts.

BISHOP. Venerbey-Jones? I don't like him—a man of

wrath. No. I'm going on to Mr. Lewis Pugh's place. I thank you for all your kindness.

TWM. Oh, that's nothing! The road you want is the second after crossing the bridge down there.

BISHOP. Thank you. Well, my friends, good night to you both.

TWM AND DICKY. Good night, sir.

[*The BISHOP, carrying his bag, begins to move away.*]

DICKY. And mind you don't fall into the river, sir.

BISHOP. If there's a river about, I shan't be surprised to find myself in it. Good night to you. Good night.

TWM AND DICKY. Good night.

[*The BISHOP goes off on the right.*]

DICKY. Mawredd, Twm, we've got something to tell 'em in the blacksmith-shop to-morrow! What do they say for a bishop, Twm? Your Worship?

TWM. Even an ordinary mayor gets that much.

DICKY. I know what to call him.

TWM. What?

DICKY. His Holy Highness.

TWM. Very right and proper it sounds, too.

DICKY [*eagerly*]. And now, Twm, what about that salmon?

TWM [*taking up the spear and the torch and giving the latter to DICKY*]. Yes. Here's your torch. [*Looking to the right*] What's that noise?

DICKY. Only his Holy Highness. He frightened the donkey.

TWM. I hope the old chap hasn't gone into the river. Now, Dicky.

DICKY [*in great delight*]. Ha, ha, ha! Spear and torch and the river once again! [*Beginning to cut capers*] Ha, ha! Oh, darro, Twm—I feel I want to go there dancing.

TWM. Steady, my lad, steady. Come along.

[*They go off through the trees at the back, DICKY laughing to himself. There is a short pause*
JENKINS THE KEEPER comes in from the left, moving stealthily.

JENKINS [*whispering, with a gesture to people without*] H'sh! Stay there, all four of you. Don't show yourselves till I blow my whistle.

A VOICE [*without, in a whisper*]. Righto, Jenkins.

JENKINS [*advancing and noting the things near the fire*] Ah! [*Returning to talk to his companions*] They mean to come back here—and with fish or game, you can be sure [*Suddenly crouching and looking to the right*] H'sh! Who's that on the road? He—yes, he's carrying a bag. One of Twm Tinker's poaching pals, I've no doubt. I'll tackle this fellow myself. Get to your places.

[*There is a brief murmur without, then silence*
JENKINS, bending low, moves round in the shadows to a position from which he can pounce upon the newcomer.

[*The BISHOP comes in again from the right, and, struggling along, loaded up with his bag and odd items of attire, he makes a sorry spectacle. His clothes are wet; his collar is limp and stained; his hat is gone. He has taken off his coat and is carrying it on his arm. He has also removed his gaiters and a few inches of under-pants are to be seen above his old-fashioned grey socks.*

BISHOP [*muttering as he comes in*]. Dear, dear, dear!
[*Aloud*] Excuse me. [*To himself*] Gone!

JENKINS [*springing upon him*]. I've got you, you rascal!

BISHOP [*startled and dropping his things*]. Oh!
[*Struggling*] Let go! How dare you?

JENKINS. Let go, indeed! [*Tightening his grip*] Not of your sort—you thieving scoundrel!

BISHOP. Scoundrel? Thieving? I? [*Wriggling hard*]
I've never heard such a——

JENKINS. Keep still, I tell you.

BISHOP. I will not keep still.

JENKINS. Then I'll make you. [*Striking him*] Now!

BISHOP [*angry*]. A blow! Heavens above—a blow!
[*He wrenches himself free, and faces JENKINS with fists raised in good boxing style.*] Don't think I can't defend myself. I'm not afraid of any village hooligan—not I!

JENKINS [*trying to seize him again*]. You've got to——

BISHOP [*beating him off*]. Ah! You would, would you? [*Exchanging blows, not without credit*] Take that, you blackguard—yes, and that. Don't think you can frighten me—just because I'm a clergyman.

JENKINS [*with a shout of surprise*]. What? [*Drawing back*] Clergyman? Did you say 'clergyman'?

BISHOP. Yes, clergyman. Can't you see? No, perhaps you can't. I fell into the river. But here—look at my collar.

JENKINS. Yes—your collar; your way of speaking, too——

BISHOP. And who are you to dare to carry on in this fashion? What's your name?

JENKINS. Jenkins. I'm head keeper to Mr. Venerbey Jones.

BISHOP [*snorting*]. Oh—him?

JENKINS. A clergyman? Well, well, well! [*Still a little suspicious*] But what are you doing in such a state—

BISHOP [*sharply*]. State?

JENKINS. And at this time of night too?

BISHOP [*who thoroughly dislikes JENKINS now*]. That's no business of yours, my man.

JENKINS. P'raps not. Well, I'd better move along. I'm sorry for laying hands on you, sir.

BISHOP [*preening himself a little*]. You got as good as you gave, I think.

JENKINS. Good night, sir.

BISHOP [*curtly*]. Good night.

[JENKINS goes away on the left.

[*The BISHOP shakes the water from his coat and puts it on. He sets his gaiters by the fire to dry. Opening his bag, he takes out his nightshirt, which is soaking wet, wrings it, and spreads it upon one of the boxes by the fire. As he begins to recover from his ducking and from the exertion of his fisticuffs his native cheerfulness comes back to him. A breeze stirs the leafage. He listens with a smile of pleasure. An owl hoots near by.*

BISHOP [*clapping his hands and shouting*]. Look out, you little fellows! [*Smiling and murmuring to himself*] Poor Dicky! Where are— [*Turning towards the trees*] Yes, I suppose so—the river. [*Recalling the allurements of Dicky's talk, he stirs uneasily.*] How does it— [*He raises his hand and brings it down in the movement of spearing.*]

Swish! [*A smile flits over his face and he sighs—enviously.*]
Ah, well! [*He gets up and paces to and fro, fighting down the subversive appeal.*] I? No, no, no—NO! [*His pace slackens, and he pauses to peer through the trees.*] Still, just to watch—— [*With another movement.*] Swish!

[*The corncrake sounds its note.*
[*Starting violently*] No, certainly not—not for a moment!

[*He falls to pacing to and fro again.*
[DICKY and TWM come back. DICKY carries a large salmon. TWM has the spear and the BISHOP's hat, which he has recovered from the river. For a moment the newcomers do not see the BISHOP, whose march of self-conquest has carried him into a patch of shadow. DICKY reaches a position near the fire before the BISHOP is aware of their return.

BISHOP [*delighted*]. Ah—my hat!

DICKY [*frightened*]. Oh!

[*He drops the salmon near the fire.*
TWM [*promptly getting rid of the spear*]. Darro!

DICKY [*relieved*]. It's only his Holy Highness.

BISHOP. I'm sorry to trouble you again, but I walked into the water. [*Noticing the salmon*] What's this, Dicky? Still more fish?

DICKY [*smiling and at ease*]. Well you see, sir—we'd had an offer of—— [*Starting in alarm*] Twm!

TWM. Well?

DICKY. Over there—it's Jenkins the Keeper.

TWM. Jenkins?

BISHOP [*annoyed*]. That fellow again?

DICKY. And there's a man in that gateway. It's Powell the Policeman.

TWM. Somebody behind us too. Dicky—we're surrounded.

DICKY. I'll pick up the salmon.

TWM [*stopping him*]. No. P'raps they haven't seen it yet.

DICKY. What shall we do?

TWM. I don't know.

DICKY. They're moving. Yes—there's Jenkins.

BISHOP. I detest that man.

TWM. Blazes, Dicky—here's my pocket full o' trout!

BISHOP. T-t-t!

TWM. Yes, and Price's letter on me somewhere.

DICKY. They're closing in on us.

TWM. It's gaol for me, boy; workhouse for you.

DICKY. Workhouse? Oh, no, no, no! [*To the BISHOP*]
Can't you help us?

BISHOP. I?

DICKY. Oh, sir, them walls all round!

BISHOP [*in sudden resolve*]. One moment! The evidence against you is this fish?

DICKY. Yes.

BISHOP [*going to the box near the fish*]. If you have sinned with your hands I've sinned also in my heart; so I may as well see this through.

TWM. What are you going to do?

BISHOP. Suppress the evidence! Now. [*Suiting his action to his words*] If I sit down and take my nightshirt—so.

DICKY. Well?

BISHOP. I can hold it to the fire—so.

DICKY. Well?

BISHOP. And drop it on to the fish—so.

TWM. And then?

BISHOP. Then I wrap it round the fish—so.

TWM [*joyfully*]. Dicky!

BISHOP. And I put the lot in my bag—so.

[*He locks salmon and nightshirt in his bag.*]

DICKY. Safe in his bag—well, I'll be blowed!

BISHOP. No keeper would dare to search a bishop.

TWM [*in a whisper*]. Here's Jenkins. [*Aloud*] Yes, sir, we'll take you up to Mr. Lewis Pugh's place with pleasure. With pleasure, sir. [JENKINS comes in from the left.]

BISHOP. So you're here again, are you?

JENKINS. What were you doing in the river just now, Twm Tinker?

TWM [*for a moment at a loss*]. The river?

JENKINS. Yes. You had a light there. What were you doing?

TWM [*holding out the BISHOP's hat as an answer comes*]. Fetching this gentleman's hat.

JENKINS. Hat? [*To the BISHOP*] Did you lose your hat?

BISHOP. I certainly did lose my hat.

JENKINS. Don't think, Twm Tinker, that you can put me off with a tale of a hat. [*To the BISHOP*] So you're a friend of this pair, after all? Yes, a fine sort of clergyman, I'll be bound. We'll take charge of the lot of you.

[*He raises his whistle to his lips.*]

BISHOP. If you blow that whistle you'll regret it.

JENKINS. Regret it? Shall I, indeed? And who are you I'd like to know?

DICKY [*sonorously*]. His Holy Highness, the Bishop of Mid-Wales.

JENKINS [*taken aback*]. Bishop?

BISHOP. Precisely! If you doubt it let me see what I have in my pockets. [*Producing envelopes*] Look at these. They're addressed to me.

JENKINS [*reading*]. "The Right Reverend the Lord Bishop of Mid-Wales."

DICKY [*aside*]. Mawredd, Twm—a lord!

JENKINS [*forced to acceptance*]. So you really *are* a bishop?

BISHOP [*taking back the envelopes*]. I know your employer. In fact, one of these letters is an invitation from him to a luncheon to-morrow.

DICKY. What? Ha, ha, ha! Twm, it's the Castle Hotel. From what I hear said, they're buying a grand big salmon for that party. [*To TWm, aside, looking towards the bag*] Twm, ha, ha, ha! The salmon!

BISHOP. I dare say you'll be glad to earn an honest shilling, Dicky. [*Significantly*] Take charge of my bag, will you?

DICKY. Take charge? [*Gleefully seizing the bag*] Oh, yes, I'll take charge of the bag!

TWM [*picking up the lamps*]. Our things will be safe enough till we come back, Dicky. Now, my lord, we'll have the donkey harnessed up in half a jiffy; and then, my lord, we'll drive you over to Mr. Lewis Pugh's, my lord.

BISHOP. Thank you, Twm. [*Coldly*] Good night, keeper.

JENKINS [*sullenly, helpless though still a little suspicious*]. Good night.



DICKY [*with sly malice*]. Good night, Mister Jenkins.

TWM. Good night, Jenkins. And, in the way o' kindness, let me tell you this: you're one o' those that's up and doing a bit too soon. [*He moves off to the right.*]

BISHOP [*following TWM*]. Yes, too soon, my good man—too soon! [*The corncrake is heard on a violent note.*]

BISHOP [*pausing, with a wave of the hand*]. Too late, my good bird—too late!

[TWM, the BISHOP, and DICKY go out on the right.]

THE CURTAIN FALLS





BROTHER WOLF

BY LAURENCE HOUSMAN



CHARACTERS

LUPO, *the robber chief.*

GIUSEPPE,	}	<i>robbers</i>
BARTOL,		
CECCO,		
BASTIANO,		
FRANCIS.		
JUNIPER.		

Approximate pronunciations : Lóopo, Jweeséppy, Bárt-oil
Chécko, Bastiáhno.



BROTHER WOLF

SCENE—A rocky defile, gloomy and precipitous. High up in the crevices of the rock grow juniper bushes and pines. Over the ground, which is the pebbly bed of a dried torrent, large boulders lie strewn. To the right is a deep fissure, or cave, from which trickles a small stream of water. Behind the bushes above, one sees the back of a sheep and a horned head which turns to look, as GIUSEPPE, hot and out of breath, comes stumbling up the gully from below. He halts, looks right and left, then puts his hands to his mouth and makes the wolf's cry.

GIUSEPPE. Wow! Wow! . . . Wow! Wow!

BARTOL [*from above*]. B-a-a!

GIUSEPPE. Hullo, Bartol, where are the rest?

BARTOL. Anywhere, for all I know. Here am I.

GIUSEPPE. I've news for them.

[*He sits down, pulls a melon from his pouch and starts slicing it.*]

BARTOL [*still wearing his sheep-skin, straddles the rock*]. Eh? Where does that come from?

GIUSEPPE. Down yonder: Assisi market. Here! Catch! [*He throws him a half-melon, which BARTOL begins eating.*]

BARTOL. News, eh? Well, what is it?

GIUSEPPE. One telling's enough. Call Lupo: bid him be quick.

BARTOL [*first howls, then barks*]. Ow-w-w! . . . Wow! Wow!

VOICE [*in the distance*]. Ow-w-w! . . . Wow! Wow!

[GIUSEPPE begins to unload his pouch: his pilferings are mainly articles of leather or steel; mixed with these are a few gewgaws, satisfying to male vanity.]

GIUSEPPE. O Lord! what fools there are in the world! I could have taken double had I wanted.

BARTOL. Easy enough in a thick crowd. See them now, down yonder, swarming through the gate like ants! [*He points forward.*]

GIUSEPPE. Aye? Market's over now. They'd got a preaching friar among them. When he began, they'd no eyes for anything. . . . Suited me well enough!

BARTOL. What? That Poverello, as they call him?

GIUSEPPE. I daresay. Hungry-looking—all eyes and a mouth. Ugh! Moon-mad: you should have heard him!

VOICE [*now nearer*]. Wow!

BARTOL. B-a-a! Cecco? Tell Messer Lupo it's Giuseppe back again.

[*Enter CECCO and BASTIANO.*]

BASTIANO. Any luck? . . . Oh!

GIUSEPPE. Where's the Wolf? Quick; I want him!

[*Enter LUPO, a fine figure of a man, with a touch of the savage dandy about him. He wears chained coins and ear-rings. He stands and looks out over ASSISI.*]

CECCO. Lo, behind you, brother.

LUPO. Ha! you vermin! Look at them! Curse, curse on you!

GIUSEPPE. Now, Messer Lupo, show yourself a wise wolf, and run! There's a holy man after you

LUPO. Heh? What's he?

GIUSEPPE. Mad! That's all I know.

BARTOL. It's the Poverello, padrone.

[*Spreading them on a slab of rock, the robbers settle down to divide GIUSEPPE's pickings among them.*]

LUPO. Does his madness bring him here?

GIUSEPPE. Aye! He is coming to catch you, Messer Lupo. That hath he sworn, with the whole city to witness. And as he so spake, Porco di Dio, you should have heard them!

LUPO. Go on, go on, Giuseppe! Make shorter tongue, and have done with it!

GIUSEPPE. 'Tis thus, Messer Lupo. He is coming with holy water; and terror will be on you! First he strikes you blind, then deaf, then dumb, then silly. Then when he hath hold of you by all your senses, he'll pick you to pieces, put you in a bag, salt you down, carry you back to Assisi, ring the bells—(He told them that: "To-night, ring the bells!" he said)—Then they'll call a feast . . . then they'll eat you.

LUPO. You dirty thief, you have been drinking!

GIUSEPPE. Dirty thief am I? Yes, I have been drinking—with my ears too: else you wouldn't be hearing of it. It's the talk of the taverns I'm telling you, and it's the truth. So now, old Wow-wow, you know what your end's going to be!

LUPO [*threateningly*]. Get! Stand up! Hands away!

[*GIUSEPPE puts up his hands; fright sobers him.*]

Now then! Clean your tongue! Out with it!

GIUSEPPE [*stammering*]. 'Tis as I said, Messer Lupo; and as I heard it. Afterwards the Poverello himself was there speaking in the market. And he said— [*He pauses.*]

LUPO. Aye, said: said what?

GIUSEPPE. I—I don't know, Messer Lupo! 'Tis all gone from me. He talked such moon-madness, 'twas more than a sane man could understand. 'Twas all "Brother Wolf," and "Brother Wolf," and "If you try to eat him," he says, "he tries to eat you. But we'll have him," he says, "so that he can harm nobody." And there was the crowd all laughing and crying round him, like a pack of fools. So he said if he brought you back to Assisi, safe and bound, would they give you to him to do with as he wished. And they all said "Aye!" And he said, "Let me have his life, and you shall have peace!" So they agreed. And—[*he stops*—that was all, Messer Lupo. For I'd got my sack full by then, and 'twas better I came away.

LUPO. Aye, so? "Safe and bound"; have my life, will they?

CECCO. You've had a many of theirs, Messer Lupo!

LUPO. And will have more! Ah, you blind bats! [*Shaking his fist towards ASSISI*] Wait, wait, till my whelps be grown! . . . Up, Bartol, to your post!

[*BARTOL resumes his sheep-skin and returns to his perch.*]

GIUSEPPE. They have a great fear of you, Messer Lupo.

LUPO. They do well.

GIUSEPPE. None will go forth of the city now, but armed and in company.

LUPO. It shall not save them.

CECCO. No, nor their flocks, either.

GIUSEPPE. Ah! And you should hear the farmers talk of all the sheep and goats we have taken. For every one that is true they tell of ten. So now, with so many missing, they say there be fifty of us!

LUPO. And we will be fifty yet! Ah, you dogs, you dogs! When I have gathered my pack I will make you yelp!

OTHERS. Where are the rest, Messer Lupo? Where are the rest of us?

LUPO. They come, they come, brothers. Patience! You are but the first.

ALL. Wow! Wow!

LUPO. Then, then we will taste blood!

ALL. Wow! Wow!

LUPO. And go forth with sword and fire!

ALL. Wow! Wow!

LUPO. And lo, Assisi, red-eyed and roofless, glaring into the dark!

ALL. Assisi, Assisi! Down with Assisi! Wow! Wow!

LUPO. Aye, hearken to me, now! You beat me, you stoned me, you cast me out! So, like a beast you hunted me! I sought justice; it was denied. You mocked me: you would not hear.

ALL. Ow-w-w! Wow! Wow!

[LUPO draws his dagger for pantomime.]

LUPO. Over his head by night, I burned the roof of my betrayer; and with sharp teeth I bit my way through the midst of them. "Wolf! Wolf!" They were up, they were after me!

ALL. Wow! Wow! Wow! Wow!

LUPO. They shut the gates, but I was over the wall. "Wolf! Wolf!" they cried, but too late. I was out, I was free.

ALL. Wow! Wow!

LUPO. Then you came, brothers: for you, also, they had wronged. And together we have taught them fear! Cry, cry! Let them hear the voice of the wolf!

ALL. Wow! Wow!

LUPO. Dogs!

BARTOL. Baa-a!

[*At this cry of warning from above, LUPO goes to look.*]

LUPO. Back! Take cover, all of you.

[*The robbers disappear. LUPO and CECCO enter the cave; GIUSEPPE creeps under a pine-root, BASTIANO behind a large boulder; BARTOL keeps cover under his sheep-skin. Enter FRANCIS, followed by JUNIPER, carrying a sack.*]

JUNIPER. Not so fast, Father Francis! Oh, for the love of God, not so fast!

FRANCIS. Are you weary, Brother?

JUNIPER. Truly no, Father; not weary. But this is an ill place we be come to.

FRANCIS. Wherefor?

JUNIPER. Eh! dark, I mean.

FRANCIS. Farther on it will be darker.

JUNIPER. Aye, and rough stones, Father, to stumble over; and holes to fall into; and torrents to get drowned in; and caves—[*He turns and sees FRANCIS approaching the entrance of the cave*—Oh, for the love of God, don't go there, Father! There's somebody in it!



FRANCIS. Sister Water is there, Brother. If she fears not, why should we?

JUNIPER. Eh, but she is coming out as fast as she can run.

FRANCIS. She is kind, Brother: and because we are thirsty she runs to meet us. [*He stoops to drink.*]

JUNIPER [*holding back*]. I shouldn't wonder, Father, but there's blood in it. [*A stone followed by rubble falls from above.*] O Lord, what's that?

FRANCIS. Come, drink, Brother. This water is cool and clear, and will refresh you. Farther on, we may find none.

JUNIPER. Are we to go farther, Father? Why are we to go farther?

FRANCIS. To find Brother Wolf.

JUNIPER. The Lord preserve us from him! What's in this bag, Father?

FRANCIS. Food, Juniper, and wine and raiment.

[*He sets it upon a rock in the foreground. LUPO, followed by CECCO, comes and stands in the entrance of the cave. The other robbers raise their heads cautiously to listen.*]

JUNIPER. What will the big robber want with that, Father?

FRANCIS. For his body—it is all that he *can* want.

JUNIPER. I think not, Father. What he wants is blood, and terror, foul lust, and cruelty. He puts men in bonds, Father; he draws out their insides; he pulls out their teeth; he cuts off their ears; he tears out their hearts! Oh!

FRANCIS. So will I do to him, Brother.

JUNIPER. Thou, Father!

FRANCIS. Ere this day is over, Juniper, thou shalt see Brother Wolf in bonds. Yea, I will draw out his inside, and his teeth shall not harm me. I will have him by the nose and the ears; and I will pull out his heart.

[At this, from LUPO and his robber-band, there is much grinding of teeth. They begin to close in on FRANCIS, who, taking the sack from JUNIPER, has begun to sort out its contents. They sit down on a rock to rest.]

JUNIPER. Well, Father, if it be God's will we shall be hanged for it!

FRANCIS. Thou shalt see a wolf changed into a lamb, Juniper.

BARTOL. Baa-a!

JUNIPER. There's a wise sheep, Father. He answers you!

[FRANCIS displays bread, meat, and wine, setting them on the rock before him.]

FRANCIS. Look you, Brother, is not this a fair feast? Shall it not rejoice his eyes when he beholds it?

[LUPO's eyes do not respond to the invitation.]

JUNIPER. Why should it, Father? For by the robbery of honest men he can get all that and more.

FRANCIS. Brother Wolf is no fool, Juniper. Think you that it doth not grieve him to rob men? For why should you seek to rob others, if you yourself be not in need?

JUNIPER. Truly, Father, I have no wish to rob others!

FRANCIS. And dost thou think there is any man in the world more foolish than thou art? Brother Wolf hath eyes like you and me: doth he not prefer light to darkness? He

hath ears : doth he not prefer greetings to reproaches? He hath a heart, Brother : shall he not prefer kindness to misery? If he had food enough of his own, would he filch it from thee?

JUNIPER. I know not, Father.

FRANCIS. Why, no! For if thou art a robber, men fear thee, and seek not thy company : therefore, thou art lonely. Also, when they hunt thee, thou must run and hide : therefore, thou art homeless. And being homeless thou hast no family, nor friends to whom thou canst do service. And if thou have none of these, of what use to thee is the wealth thou takest from others?

JUNIPER. I have none of these, Father : but neither have I wealth.

FRANCIS. Thou hast great wealth, Juniper : for thou hast charity. All that thou hast thou givest. Therefore give charity to Brother Wolf, and take pity on him, seeing that he is very sorry for himself.

[At this point the grinding of LUPO's teeth becomes almost audible. His followers, too, mentally dazed to follow the argument, take their cue from him, and do likewise.]

JUNIPER. Father, it's no use pretending, is it, Father?

FRANCIS. No, Brother.

JUNIPER. May I say truly as I have a mind?

FRANCIS. I command you, my son.

JUNIPER. Father, you have a holy madness in you, and there's no curing you. I've prayed, Father—often I've prayed the Lord to give you back your senses. But he



hasn't done it. He's only taken mine too. So here's the pair of us, with not enough sense left to catch a flea—let alone a robber. And if I wasn't so mad, Father, I'd think we were in danger now. For I've a feeling that I've only got to turn my head and I should see something.

FRANCIS. Brother Juniper, I will tell thee a story.

JUNIPER. Yes, Father?

FRANCIS. A young hawk fell from its nest, so hurt that it could not fly. When I took it to hand, it pecked and drew blood. But I did not kill it; it was helpless, so I brought it home with me. And its beak was very sharp.

JUNIPER. 'Twas a bright bird! It knew how to get round you, Father.

FRANCIS. Then I made it a nest, and brought food for it. It ate mice, brother, and meat, and dead vermin; and when it could get nothing else, it ate me. But though it liked the taste of me, it had no love for me. So when its wing was healed and it could fly, forthwith it departed.

JUNIPER. A hawk is a vile bird, Father.

FRANCIS. A hawk is a hawk, Brother. When God made hawks He was not making men. So, when He made wolves, it was not men either: and never shall a wolf become a man. How, then, can a man become a wolf?

JUNIPER. But the hawk did ill, Father: for thou hadst saved his life.

FRANCIS. Even so hath God saved mine: yet do I sin against Him. Now when He, by love, showeth us how we be helpless, He showeth us also the helplessness of others.

And since I loved Brother Hawk, that tore my flesh from me, shall I not also love Brother Wolf?

[*This is altogether beyond the comprehension of LUPO and his companions: but at least they can put the matter to the test. To that end LUPO gives a signal; and the robbers, cord in hand, draw close to their intended victims, while FRANCIS continues to instruct Brother JUNIPER.*]

Aye, though he should put bonds on me, and draw out my teeth and my inside—

[*JUNIPER catches sight of the robbers that are about to fall on FRANCIS.*]

JUNIPER. O Father! Father!

FRANCIS. —and cut off my ears and tongue, and tear out my—

[*At a signal from LUPO the robbers fall on them and bind them. JUNIPER struggles instinctively, but without desperation. FRANCIS accepts the interruption as a step upon the road.*]

FRANCIS. Is that you, Brother Wolf?

LUPO. Aye! My teeth are in thee now, Friar. Safe and bound!

FRANCIS. Thou hast begun well, Brother. Tarry awhile. See now, Juniper, here hath Brother Wolf got his teeth in me—in thee also. And, by the look of him, he is going to tear us to pieces. Yet shall we still love him. And by nothing that he may do can he prevent it.

LUPO [*drawing his knife*]. Not if I slay thee? How then?

JUNIPER. O Father, say a prayer for me!

[*But JUNIPER's captors cuff him to silence.*]

FRANCIS. Thou art very like a wolf, Brother. But a wolf stands not on his hind legs as thou dost.

LUPO. Peace, thou fool!

FRANCIS. God give thee peace also, Brother!

LUPO [*to JUNIPER*]. Thou fellow, is this man mad?

JUNIPER. Aye, Brother! He is more mad than I am. For I have it only by fits, but he always.

FRANCIS. Thou hast a kind face, Brother. Tell me thy true name.

[*This affront to his face makes LUPO more murderously inclined than ever.*]

JUNIPER [*cheerfully encouraged by the example of FRANCIS*]. Bite him! Bite him, Brother Wolf! He will like thee the better for it!

LUPO. Cease, babbler! Or I cut out thy tongue.

FRANCIS. Cut out mine first, Brother; 'tis the longer. And the more thou hast of it, the better shall it pay thee!

LUPO. These be not sane men!

JUNIPER [*with conviction*]. We are not, Brother!

FRANCIS. Yet rather would I give thee my heart. There is not much meat on my bones; but my heart thou shalt find tender.

CECCO. Messer Lupo, these men make mock of thee.

LUPO. So be! Patience, and we will hear them. Sirrah, whence come you?

FRANCIS. From down yonder—from Assisi.

LUPO. Wherefor?

FRANCIS. To find thee, Brother.

LUPO. To what end?

FRANCIS. To succour thee, for thou art in misery.

LUPO [*restraining himself*]. Go on, Friar.

FRANCIS. Now for thy body (which is a small thing) here is food and raiment.

GIUSEPPE. Have a care, master! He hath bewitched them.

FRANCIS. For thy soul (which is a great thing), alas, Brother, thy soul, thy soul is in jeopardy!

LUPO. And thy life! [*He raises his knife.*]

FRANCIS. Brother Wolf, thou art a foul liver. Thou hast done great wickedness.

[*LUPO lowers his knife in astonishment.*]

Shame on thee, Brother, shame on thee!

CECCO. Master, shall this man live?

LUPO. Peace, Cecco!

FRANCIS. Thou hast been cruel, and hast shed blood; thou hast robbed, thou hast burned, thou hast wasted; and the riches which God gave thee, thou hast vilely cast away.

LUPO. Which God gave me, Friar?

FRANCIS. Did He not give thee a heart, Brother?—eyes, also, and a brain? Hadst thou not compassion and kindness and understanding? Was not thy strength given thee for the service of men? And lo, now, in thy heart is hatred, and in thine eyes blindness; and fire burns in thy brain, and blood is upon thy hands. Shall I not weep, therefore, for the misery wherein I find thee?

LUPO. Thou art a brave Friar! Dost thou not fear death?

FRANCIS. For thee, Brother, greatly I fear it. Lo, the Pit: and in the Pit the flame leapeth: and in the flame the

soul of him that I-love perisheth! For, lo, the Pit opens: and wherever thou goest the flame runneth after thee.

[LUPO and the robbers start back horrified.]

Now it is under thy feet, now it catches thee by the hands, now by the throat, now by the heart!

ROBBERS. Messer Lupo, this man is a holy terror. Save us, save us!

FRANCIS. And lo, and lo, and lo! . . .

[There comes a deep rumbling, a great fall of rock and shale slides down the mountain. The mouth of the pass is filled with rubble and torn trees.]

ROBBERS. Oh! Oh! Oh! The mountain is falling on us!

[They run hither and thither and cower in hiding-places. JUNIPER, bound hand and foot, performs a sack-race dance across obstacles, and kneels before FRANCIS, very shaken and trembling.]

JUNIPER. O Father Francis, Father Francis, put your arms round me, or I shall go through!

FRANCIS. 'Tis only Brother Mountain shaking himself. Do not be afraid!

JUNIPER. I'd wish it were only some one else then, Father. Ah! There! He's at it again!

[There comes another landslide. The robbers howl despairingly, and run. LUPO stays fixed, half-raised from the ground to which he has fallen. He stares at FRANCIS, to whom JUNIPER is now clinging with his bound hands.]

FRANCIS. It is over, Juniper.

JUNIPER. Ah! Then let us be quick away, Father, ere they be back on us. Look! If I undo thy bonds, then canst thou undo mine.

FRANCIS. Why should we run away, Juniper? Brother Wolf needs us.

JUNIPER. Sure and true! Looks as if all his teeth had dropped out, Father!

[*For JUNIPER has read signs that do much to reassure him. LUPO comes forward and cuts their bonds.*]

LUPO. Take thy curse from me, Father Friar, for I am not fit to die.

FRANCIS. I did not curse thee, Brother.

LUPO. Ah! Did not the Pit open?

FRANCIS. It was a little fall of earth, Brother. Mother Earth opened her hand; but she was kind and hath hurt nobody.

LUPO. Aye: but why came it then?

FRANCIS. I know not. Come, call thy men back to thee, for I would speak with them.

LUPO. They are gone. I am alone!

FRANCIS. Not alone, Brother.

LUPO. Thou man of wonder! Who art thou?

FRANCIS. I am the little fool of Assisi, the Poverello; hast thou not heard tell of him? Men laugh when they speak of me.

LUPO. From Assisi art thou?

FRANCIS. She was my mother; I was born there.

LUPO. She was mine—and she cast me out! In the place of justice she denied me; in my own house she robbed

me; in the market she mocked me; in the street she stoned me; she cursed me, she hated me, she sought me that she might slay me. And now, shall I let vengeance go?

FRANCIS. Take thy vengeance, Brother, and do this. Be thou kind to her!

[He stretches out his arms in the form of the cross.]

LUPO. I? —kind! *[A dull amazement seizes him.]*

FRANCIS. O Brother, stand by my side, and look upon this city! Is she not fair?

[LUPO looks; there is still hatred in his eyes, his hand rests on the handle of his dagger.]

See her face, how it turns to thee in the light of the sun! Behold her towers like watchmen upon the walls, and her roofs like wings to cover her, and her windows like eyes. She hath ears also, and hands, and feet, brother; and therewithal she hath a heart. And in her heart standeth the fear of thee. Down below are streets, and doors, and a marketplace, and homes both for rich and poor. And these be full of the music of men's voices and the laughter of children, of tears also, and cries of sorrow and anger. But it is not sorrow or anger which giveth beauty to her face, or strength unto her towers. And the fear of thee that is in her heart bringeth no happiness.

Come, Brother, let thy heart go down with me into yonder city. Here is a house where a mother suckles her babe; and the child knoweth her, though he understandeth not. Here is a house where a young man bringeth his bride. He closeth the door, he turneth, he kisseth her. Sweet is the taste of love upon their lips. Here is a house where a man lies dying: he hath been strong, but now he is feeble

and weak. Many things did he •with his body, Brother; often he did ill, sometimes he did well. Now cometh death, and he understandeth not; yet the good that he did comforteth him.

[LUPO shows signs of compunction and understanding; his hand drops from his dagger.]

FRANCIS. Yea, because he had love and not hatred within his heart, therefore he is not solitary.

[FRANCIS lays his hand on LUPO's breast.]

Ah, Brother, what is this that moveth *thy* heart, so that it leapeth? Listen, I will tell thee. A man stood once and looked upon a city; grievously had she sinned. And by his side stood the angel of God that was come to destroy it. So he said to the angel, "If there be found in this city fifty righteous, wilt thou not spare it for fifty's sake?" And he answered, "I will spare it for fifty." Then he said, "If there lack five of the fifty?" "I will not destroy it for lack of five." "If there be forty?" "I will not destroy it for lack of ten." "If there be thirty?" "Nay." "If there be twenty?" The angel said, "I will not destroy it for twenty's sake."

[LUPO begins slowly to unbuckle the belt of his dagger.]

And he said, "Oh, let not my Lord be angry, and I will speak but this once. Peradventure there shall be ten found there?" And he said, "I will not destroy it for ten's sake."

[LUPO's belt and dagger fall to the ground. JUNIPER, with eyes avid for signs, continues to cross himself and pray.]

Brother Wolf, thou art a sinner, as I also am a sinner. Wilt thou, having so many sins to thy charge, be less merciful than God that is without sin?

[LUPO buries his face in his hands. From a distance comes the chiming of bells.]

JUNIPER. It is the bells, Father!

FRANCIS. Yes, 'tis the bells of Assisi that thou hearest. They are ringing for thee. Come, and I will show thee twenty in that city, yea forty, yea fifty, yea an hundred that shall be glad, when thou hast taken from their hearts the fear they have of thee. . . . [A pause.] Brother Wolf.

[LUPO, with a sob, reaches out his hand to FRANCIS.]

LUPO. I am blind, Father; lead me. . . . My life is in thy hands. I will go down with thee! Yes, I will go down.

JUNIPER [wrapt in ecstasy]. O Father, I was a fool! For when I came here, I was afraid.

[But FRANCIS, wrapt likewise, listens and does not answer. The bells say everything.]

C U R T A I N.



RIDERS TO THE SEA

BY J. M. SYNGE



CHARACTERS


MAURYA, *an old woman*

BARTLEY, *her son*

CATHLEEN, *her daughter*

NORA, *a younger daughter*

MEN AND WOMEN



RIDERS TO THE SEA

SCENE: *An island off the west of Ireland.*

Cottage kitchen, with nets, oilskins, spinning-wheel, some new boards standing by the wall, etc. CATHLEEN, a girl of about twenty, finishes kneading cake, and puts it down in the pot-oven by the fire; then wipes her hands, and begins to spin at the wheel. NORA, a young girl, puts her head in at the door.

NORA [*in a low voice*]. Where is she?

CATHLEEN. She's lying down, God help her, and maybe sleeping, if she's able.

[*NORA comes in softly and takes a bundle from under her shawl.*]

CATHLEEN [*spinning the wheel rapidly*]. What is it you have?

NORA. The young priest is after bringing them. It's a shirt and a plain stocking were got off a drowned man in Donegal.

[*CATHLEEN stops her wheel with a sudden movement, and leans out to listen.*]

We're to find out if it's Michael's they are, some time herself will be down looking by the sea.

CATHLEEN. How would they be Michael's, Nora? How would he go the length of that way to the far north?

NORA. The young priest says he's known the like of it. "If it's Michael's they are," says he, "you can tell herself he's got a clean burial, by the grace of God; and if they're

not his, let no one say a word about them, for she'll be getting her death," says he, "crying with and lamenting."

[The door which NORA half closed is blown open by a gust of wind.]

CATHLEEN *[looking out anxiously]*. Did you ask him would he stop Bartley going this day with the horses to the Galway fair?

NORA. "I won't stop him," says he; "but let you not be afraid. Herself does be saying prayers half through the night, and the Almighty God won't leave her destitute," says he, "with no son living."

CATHLEEN. Is the sea bad by the white rocks, Nora?

NORA. Middling bad, God help us. There's a great roaring in the west, and it's worse it'll be getting when the tide's turned to the wind. *[She goes over to the table with the bundle.]* Shall I open it now?

CATHLEEN. Maybe she'd wake up on us, and come in before we'd done *[coming to the table]*. It's a long time we'll be, and the two of us crying.

NORA *[goes to the inner door and listens]*. She's moving about on the bed. She'll be coming in a minute.

CATHLEEN. Give me the ladder, and I'll put them up in the turf-loft, the way she won't know of them at all, and maybe when the tide turns she'll be going down to see would he be floating from the east.

[They put the ladder against the gable of the chimney; CATHLEEN goes up a few steps and hides the bundle in the turf-loft. MAURIA comes from the inner room.]



MAURYA [*looking up at CATHLEEN and speaking querulously*]. Isn't it turf enough you have for this day and evening?

CATHLEEN. There's a cake baking at the fire for a short space [*throwing down the turf*], and Bartley will want it when the tide turns if he goes to Connemara.

[*NORA picks up the turf and puts it round the pot-oven.*]

MAURYA [*sitting down on a stool at the fire*]. He won't go this day with the wind rising from the south and west. He won't go this day, for the young priest will stop him surely.

NORA. He'll not stop him, Mother; and I heard Eamon Simon and Stephen Pheety and Colum Shawn saying he would go.

MAURYA. Where is he itself?

NORA. He went down to see would there be another boat sailing in the week, and I'm thinking it won't be long till he's here now, for the tide's turning at the green head, and the hooker's tacking from the east.

CATHLEEN. I hear some one passing the big stones.

NORA [*looking out*]. He's coming now, and he in a hurry.

BARTLEY [*comes in and looks round the room. Speaking sadly and quietly*]. Where is the bit of new rope, Cathleen, was bought in Connemara?

CATHLEEN [*coming down*]. Give it to him, Nora; it's on a nail by the white boards. I hung it up this morning, for the pig with the black feet was eating it.

NORA [*giving him a rope*]. Is that it, Bartley?

MAURYA. You'd do right to leave that rope, Bartley, hanging by the boards. [BARTLEY takes the rope.] It will be wanting in this place, I'm telling you, if Michael is washed up to-morrow morning, or the next morning, or any morning in the week; for it's a deep grave we'll make him, by the grace of God.

BARTLEY [*beginning to work with the rope*]. I've no halter the way I can ride down on the mare, and I must go now quickly. This is the one boat going for two weeks or beyond it, and the fair will be a good fair for horses, I heard them saying below.

MAURYA. It's a hard thing they'll be saying below if the body is washed up and there's no man in it to make the coffin, and I after giving a big price for the finest white boards you'd find in Connemara.

[*She looks round at the boards.*]

BARTLEY. How would it be washed up, and we after looking each day for nine days, and a strong wind blowing a while back from the west and south?

MAURYA. If it isn't found itself, that wind is raising the sea, and there was a star up against the moon, and it rising in the night. If it was a hundred horses, or a thousand horses, you had itself, what is the price of a thousand horses against a son where there is one son only?

BARTLEY [*working at the halter, to CATHLEEN*]. Let you go down each day, and see the sheep aren't jumping in on the rye, and if the jobber comes you can sell the pig with the black feet if there is a good price going.

MAURYA. How would the like of her get a good price for a pig?

BARTLEY [*to CATHLEEN*]. If the west wind holds with the last bit of the moon let you and Nora get up weed enough for another cock for the kelp. It's hard set we'll be from this day with no one in it but one man to work.

MAURYA. It's hard set we'll be surely the day you're drowned with the rest. What way will I live and the girls with me, and I an old woman looking for the grave?

[BARTLEY *lays down the halter, takes off his old coat, and puts on a newer one of the same flannel.*

BARTLEY [*to NORA*]. Is she coming to the pier?

NORA [*looking out*]. She's passing the green head and letting fall her sails.

BARTLEY [*getting his purse and tobacco*]. I'll have half an hour to go down, and you'll see me coming again in two days, or in three days, or maybe in four days if the wind is bad.

MAURYA [*turning round to the fire and putting the shawl over her head*]. Isn't it a hard and cruel man won't hear a word from an old woman, and she holding him from the sea?

CATHLEEN. It's the life of a young man to be going on the sea, and who would listen to an old woman with one thing and she saying it over?

BARTLEY [*taking the halter*]. I must go now quickly. I'll ride down on the red mare, and the grey pony'll run behind me. . . . The blessing of God on you. [*He goes out.*

MAURYA [*crying out as he is in the door*]. He's gone now, God spare us, and we'll not see him again. He's gone now,



and when the black night is falling I'll have no son left me in the world.

CATHLEEN. Why wouldn't you give him your blessing and he looking round in the door? Isn't it sorrow enough is on every one in this house without your sending him out with an unlucky word behind him, and a hard word in his ear?

[MAURYA takes up the tongs and begins raking the fire aimlessly without looking round.]

NORA [turning towards her]. You're taking away the turf from the cake.

CATHLEEN [crying out]. The Son of God forgive us. Nora, we're after forgetting his bit of bread.

[She comes over to the fire.]

NORA. And it's destroyed he'll be going till dark night, and he after eating nothing since the sun went up.

CATHLEEN [turning the cake out of the oven]. It's destroyed he'll be, surely. There's no sense left on any person in a house where an old woman will be talking for ever.

[MAURYA sways herself on her stool.]

CATHLEEN [cutting off some of the bread and rolling it in a cloth; to MAURYA]. Let you go down now to the spring well and give him this and he passing. You'll see him then and the dark word will be broken, and you can say "God speed you," the way he'll be easy in his mind.

MAURYA [taking the bread]. Will I be in it as soon as himself?

CATHLEEN. If you go now quickly.

MAURYA [standing up unsteadily]. It's hard set I am to walk.



CATHLEEN [*looking at her anxiously*]. Give her the stick, Nora, or maybe she'll slip on the big stones.

NORA. What stick?

CATHLEEN. The stick Michael brought from Connemara.

MAURYA [*taking a stick NORA gives her*]. In the big world the old people do be leaving things after them for their sons and children, but in this place it is the young men do be leaving things behind for them that do be old.

[*She goes out slowly. NORA goes over to the ladder.*]

CATHLEEN. Wait, Nora, maybe she'd turn back quickly. She's that sorry, God help her, you wouldn't know the thing she'd do.

NORA. Is she gone round by the bush?

CATHLEEN [*looking out*]. She's gone now. Throw it down quickly, for the Lord knows when she'll be out of it again.

NORA [*getting the bundle from the loft*]. The young priest said he'd be passing to-morrow, and we might go down and speak to him below if it's Michael's they are surely.

CATHLEEN [*taking the bundle*]. Did he say what way they were found?

NORA [*coming down*]. "There were two men," says he, "and they rowing round with poteen before the cocks crowed, and the oar of one of them caught the body, and they passing the black cliffs of the north."

CATHLEEN [*trying to open the bundle*]. Give me a knife, Nora; the string's perished with the salt water, and there's a black knot on it you wouldn't loosen in a week.

NORA [*giving her a knife*]. I've heard tell it was a long way to Donegal.

CATHLEEN [*cutting the string*]. It is surely. There was a man in here a while ago—the man sold us that knife—and he said if you set off walking from the rocks beyond, it would be in seven days you'd be in Donegal.

NORA. And what time would a man take, and he floating?

[CATHLEEN opens the bundle and takes out a bit of a shirt and a stocking. They look at them eagerly.]

CATHLEEN [*in a low voice*]. The Lord spare us, Nora! isn't it a queer hard thing to say if it's his they are surely?

NORA. I'll get his shirt off the hook the way we can put the one flannel on the other. [*She looks through some clothes hanging in the corner.*] It's not with them, Cathleen, and where will it be?

CATHLEEN. I'm thinking Bartley put it on him in the morning, for his own shirt was heavy with the salt in it. [*Pointing to the corner*] There's a bit of a sleeve was of the same stuff. Give me that and it will do. [NORA brings it to her and they compare the flannel.] It's the same stuff, Nora; but if it is itself aren't there great rolls of it in the shops of Galway, and isn't it many another man may have a shirt of it as well as Michael himself?

NORA [*who has taken up the stocking and counted the stitches, crying out*]. It's Michael, Cathleen, it's Michael; God spare his soul, and what will herself say when she hears this story, and Bartley on the sea?

CATHLEEN [*taking the stocking*]. It's a plain stocking.

NORA. It's the second one of the third pair I knitted, and I put up three-score stitches, and I dropped four of them.



CATHLEEN [*counts the stitches*]. It's that number is in it [*crying out*]. Ah, Nora, isn't it a bitter thing to think of him floating that way to the far north, and no one to keen him but the black hags that do be flying on the sea?

NORA [*swinging herself half round, and throwing out her arms on the clothes*]. And isn't it a pitiful thing when there is nothing left of a man who was a great rower and fisher but a bit of an old shirt and a plain stocking?

CATHLEEN [*after an instant*]. Tell me is herself coming, Nora? I hear a little sound on the path.

NORA [*looking out*]. She is, Cathleen. She's coming up to the door.

CATHLEEN. Put these things away before she'll come in. Maybe it's easier she'll be after giving her blessing to Bartley, and we won't let on we've heard anything the time he's on the sea.

NORA [*helping CATHLEEN to close the bundle*]. We'll put them here in the corner.

[*They put them into a hole in the chimney-corner.*

CATHLEEN goes back to the spinning-wheel.

NORA. Will she see it was crying I was?

CATHLEEN. Keep your back to the door the way the light'll not be on you.

[*NORA sits down at the chimney-corner, with her back to the door. MAURYA comes in very slowly, without looking at the girls, and goes over to her stool at the other side of the fire. The cloth with the bread is still in her hand. The girls look at each other, and NORA points to the bundle of bread.*

CATHLEEN [*after spinning for a moment*]. You didn't give him his bit of bread? *

[MAURYA *begins to keen softly, without turning round.*
CATHLEEN. Did you see him riding down?

[MAURYA *goes on keening.*

CATHLEEN [*a little impatiently*]. God forgive you; isn't it a better thing to raise your voice and tell what you seen, than to be making lamentation for a thing that's done? Did you see Bartley, I'm saying to you?

MAURYA [*with a weak voice*]. My heart's broken from this day.

CATHLEEN [*as before*]. Did you see Bartley?

MAURYA. I seen the fearfulest thing.

CATHLEEN [*leaves her wheel and looks out*]. God forgive you; he's riding the mare now over the green head, and the grey pony behind him.

MAURYA [*starts, so that her shawl falls back from her head and shows her white tossed hair. With a frightened voice*]. The grey pony behind him . . .

CATHLEEN [*coming to the fire*]. What is it ails you at all?

MAURYA [*speaking very slowly*]. I've seen the fearfulest thing any person has seen since the day Bride Dara seen the dead man with the child in his arms.

CATHLEEN and NORA. Uah.

[*They crouch down in front of the old woman at the fire.*

NORA. Tell us what it is you seen.

MAURYA. I went down to the spring well, and I stood there saying a prayer to myself. Then Bartley came along,

and he riding on the red mare with the grey pony behind him [*she puts up her hands as if to hide something from her eyes*]. The Son of God spare us, Nora!

CATHLEEN. What is it you seen?

MAURYA. I seen Michael himself.

CATHLEEN [*speaking softly*]. You did not, Mother. It wasn't Michael you seen, for his body is after being found in the far north, and he's got a clean burial, by the grace of God.

MAURYA [*a little defiantly*]. I'm after seeing him this day, and he riding and galloping. Bartley came first on the red mare, and I tried to say "God speed you," but something choked the words in my throat. He went by quickly; and "The blessing of God on you," says he, and I could say nothing. I looked up then, and I crying, at the grey pony, and there was Michael upon it—with fine clothes on him, and new shoes on his feet.

CATHLEEN [*begins to keen*]. It's destroyed we are from this day. It's destroyed, surely.

NORA. Didn't the young priest say the Almighty God won't leave her destitute with no son living?

MAURYA [*in a low voice, but clearly*]. It's little the like of him knows of the sea. . . . Bartley will be lost now, and let you call in Eamon and make me a good coffin out of the white boards, for I won't live after them. I've had a husband, and a husband's father, and six sons in this house—six fine men, though it was a hard birth I had with every one of them and they coming to the world—and some of them were found and some of them were not found, but they're gone now the lot of them. . . . There were Stephen and

Shawn were lost in the great wind, and found after in the Bay of Gregory of the Golden Mouth, and carried up the two of them on one plank, and in by that door.

[She pauses for a moment. The girls start as if they heard something through the door that is half open behind them.]

NORA *[in a whisper]*. Did you hear that, Cathleen? Did you hear a noise in the north-east?

CATHLEEN *[in a whisper]*. There's some one after crying out by the seashore.

MAURYA *[continues without hearing anything]*. There was Sheamus and his father, and his own father again, were lost in a dark night, and not a stick or sign was seen of them when the sun went up. There was Patch after was drowned out of a curragh that was turned over. I was sitting here with Bartley, and he a baby lying on my two knees, and I seen two women, and three women, and four women coming in, and they crossing themselves and not saying a word. I looked out then, and there were men coming after them, and they holding a thing in the half of a red sail, and water dripping out of it—it was a dry day, Nora—and leaving a track to the door.

[She pauses again with her hand stretched out towards the door. It opens softly and old women begin to come in, crossing themselves on the threshold, and kneeling down in front of the stage with red petticoats over their heads.]

MAURYA *[half in a dream, to CATHLEEN]*. Is it Patch, or Michael, or what is it at all?

CATHLEEN. Michael is after being found in the far north, and when he is found there how could he be there in this place?

MAURYA. There does be a power of young men floating round in the sea, and what way would they know if it was Michael they had, or another man like him, for when a man is nine days in the sea, and the wind blowing, it's hard set his own mother would be to say what man was in it.

CATHLEEN. It's Michael, God spare him, for they're after sending us a bit of his clothes from the far north.

[She reaches out and hands MAURYA the clothes that belonged to MICHAEL. MAURYA stands up slowly and takes them in her hands. NORA looks out.]

NORA. They're carrying a thing among them, and there's water dripping out of it and leaving a track by the big stones.

CATHLEEN *[in a whisper to the women who have come in]*. Is it Bartley it is?

ONE OF THE WOMEN. It is, surely, God rest his soul.

[Two younger women come in and pull out the table. Then men carry in the body of BARTLEY, laid on a plank, with a bit of a sail over it, and lay it on the table.]

CATHLEEN *[to the women as they are doing so]*. What way was he drowned?

ONE OF THE WOMEN. The grey pony knocked him over into the sea, and he was washed out where there is a great surf on the white rocks.

[MAURYA has gone over and knelt down at the head of the table. The women are keening softly]

and swaying, themselves with a slow movement.
CATHLEEN and NORA kneel at the other end of the table. The men kneel near the door.

MAURYA [*raising her head and speaking as if she did not see the people around her*]. They're all gone now, and there isn't anything more the sea can do to me. . . . I'll have no call now to be up crying and praying when the wind breaks from the south, and you can hear the surf is in the east, and the surf is in the west, making a great stir with the two noises, and they hitting one on the other. I'll have no call now to be going down and getting Holy Water in the dark nights after Samhain, and I won't care what way the sea is when the other women will be keening. [*To NORA*] Give me the Holy Water, Nora; there's a small sup still on the dresser. [*NORA gives it to her.*]

MAURYA [*drops MICHAEL'S clothes across BARTLEY'S feet, and sprinkles the Holy Water over him*]. It isn't that I haven't prayed for you, Bartley, to the Almighty God. It isn't that I haven't said prayers in the dark night till you wouldn't know what I'd be saying; but it's a great rest I'll have now, and it's time, surely. It's a great rest I'll have now, and great sleeping in the long nights after Samhain, if it's only a bit of wet flour we do have to eat, and maybe a fish that would be stinking.

[*She kneels down again, crossing herself, and saying prayers under her breath.*]

CATHLEEN [*to an old man*]. Maybe yourself and Eamon would make a coffin when the sun rises. We have fine white boards herself bought, God help her, thinking Michael

would be found, and I have a new cake you can eat while you'll be working.

THE OLD MAN [*looking at the boards*]. Are there nails with them?

CATHLEEN. There are not, Colum; we didn't think of the nails.

ANOTHER MAN. It's a great wonder she wouldn't think of the nails, and all the coffins she's seen made already.

CATHLEEN. It's getting old she is, and broken.

[MAURYA *stands up again very slowly, and spreads out the pieces of MICHAEL's clothes beside the body, sprinkling them with the last of the Holy Water.*]

NORA [*in a whisper to CATHLEEN*]. She's quiet now and easy; but the day Michael was drowned you could hear her crying out from this to the spring well. It's fonder she was of Michael, and would anyone have thought that?

CATHLEEN [*slowly and clearly*]. An old woman will be soon tired with anything she will do, and isn't it nine days herself is after crying and keening, and making great sorrow in the house?

MAURYA [*puts the empty cup mouth downwards on the table, and lays her hands together on BARTLEY's feet*]. They're all together this time, and the end is come. May the Almighty God have mercy on Bartley's soul, and on Michael's soul, and on the souls of Sheamus and Patch, and Stephen and Shawn [*bending her head*]; and may He have



mercy on my soul, Nora, and on the soul of every one is left living in the world.

[She pauses, and the keen rises a little more loudly from the women, then sinks away.]

MAURYA *[continuing]*. Michael has a clean burial in the far north, by the grace of the Almighty God. Bartley will have a fine coffin out of the white boards, and a deep grave surely. What more can we want than that? No man at all can be living for ever, and we must be satisfied.

[She kneels down again, and the curtain falls slowly.]



A ROOM IN THE TOWER

By HUGH STEWART



CHARACTERS

IN ORDER OF THEIR APPEARANCE

MRS. TYLNEY.

LADY JANE GREY.

MRS. ELLEN.

MARY TUDOR.



A ROOM IN THE TOWER

SCENE.—*The curtain rises slowly on a sombre prison room in a house on Tower Green, 1554.*

A high window at the back overlooks the site of the scaffold. L., a door, and R., a door leading to an adjoining room. An oak table, writing-paper, and books, etc. Plain oak chairs. We discover a grey-haired waiting-woman sitting by the table. She has a needle and thread in her hand and a silk garment on her lap, but she is not sewing, only looking straight before her, quite still. A young girl's voice startles her from her reverie.

VOICE [off]. Tylney!

TYLNEY. Madam.

VOICE. Is it time, Tylney?

TYLNEY [aggrieved]. You've not been sleeping. . .

[JANE GREY, a prisoner in the Tower (with her husband, GUILDFORD DUDLEY, both under sentence of death), appears in the doorway, R. She is slight and small and her hands are constantly moving in quick nervous gestures. Her face is rather pale and drawn. Rather emotional, she is always simple and sincere.

JANE. I can't sleep. It's so cold in there. I have tried, but it's useless . . . useless.

TYLNEY. You look so tired.

JANE. I haven't slept for . . . it seems years.

TYLNEY. Have you looked in the mirror? Have you seen those dark circles under your eyes?

JANE. Mirrors don't tell the truth, they only show us masks. But what does it matter how I look? Few people will ever see me again. What time is it?

TYLNEY. It's still early, madam.

JANE. Whenever I sleep, I dream.

TYLNEY. Of what, madam?

JANE. Of the place outside the window. I dream they are killing Guildford. I stand at the window and watch. It's horrible because I'm not with him . . . I can't move!

TYLNEY. It is only a dream.

JANE [*by the window*]. He looks up to me standing here, and when he sees me, he tries to smile so bravely. Then he takes off his ruff, and kneels down. . .

TYLNEY [*leading her away*]. Madam dear, you must put these thoughts from your mind.

JANE. Ah, if I could, Tylney . . . if I could. Last night I dreamt I saw my father's head on a pike. It was lifted up and waved at me through that dreadful window. His mouth was open and the blood streamed down the staff.

TYLNEY. Your mind is distorted with all this trouble.

JANE. Why have they put me into this room? When they erected the scaffold the last time, the carpenters' hammer hit the nails into my brain. It was maddening, unceasing . . . knock . . . knock . . . knock . . . knock. . . . Is there any hope, Tylney?

TYLNEY. Of course there is; the Queen is very merciful and you are her cousin. Your youth alone . . .

JANE. Youth! [*Laughs.*] You can speak about youth to me! In July I entered this palace as Queen; I was its mistress, the mistress of all England. And now . . . what am I?

TYLNEY. We must forget the past now.

JANE. It's so difficult to forget; what is there to do here except to remember? [*With a great effort.*] Tell me, do they love their new Queen? There is some trouble, isn't there?

TYLNEY. It will prove serious, I'm afraid. She is so headstrong. . . .

JANE [*cutting her short*]. What is it?

TYLNEY. Well, it is feared that risings will break out throughout the country unless she will be ruled in time.

JANE. Ruled?

TYLNEY. The people feel strongly against her proposed marriage.

JANE. It won't be my cousin who will give in.

TYLNEY. Parliament has presented a Petition against the Spanish marriage.

JANE. Parliament is so greedy. They expect us to sacrifice everything, our whole life's happiness, everything a woman treasures most, for what? For the country, for the sake of the people. What do they give up for their country? What are they willing, themselves, to sacrifice? [*By the window.*] Oh, Tylney, look! How beautiful it is, how beautiful those trees are below with the sun glimmering through the leaves. Like tiny green lamps . . . aren't they?

TYLNEY. Are they, madam? Those trees are very, very old.



JANE. I like them better from up here; you can't see their tortured, twisted roots.

TYLNEY [*brightly*]. Shall I cut you a branch or two of leaves to-morrow? It would cheer the place up. I'll try to get you some flowers too; would you like that?

JANE. I'm sorry, what did you say?

TYLNEY. Would you like me to bring you some flowers, madam?

JANE. Oh, please.

TYLNEY. What flowers would you like?

JANE. I love every flower; they are all sweet. We have such a quiet garden at home. Lavender hedges and rosemary. Arbours loaded with red and yellow roses. I used to pick the tight, sweet-smelling buds and put them in my hair. There's a little pool I sat beside to watch my goldfish, they were so pretty . . . they used to nibble the crumbs from my finger-tips. I remember stealing there on warm evenings to listen to the nightingale. There are no nightingales here, no singing birds . . . only the croak of the raven, and they forbode evil!

TYLNEY. Come, madam, perhaps you won't be here very much longer.

JANE [*slowly*]. Not very much longer!

TYLNEY. I mean, you may . . .

JANE [*unheeding*]. They will come for me soon. Their footsteps will echo on those stairs . . . then someone will open the door and ask me if I am ready. [*Her hands creep to her throat.*] "I am quite ready, my Lords." They will lead me down . . . round . . . and round . . . and round the staircase . . . out into the air, and the light . . . everybody

will gaze at me, perhaps some of them will feel a little sorry. . . .

TYLNEY. Tell me more about your garden.

JANE. My garden?

TYLNEY. Yes, your garden at home.

JANE. Home? When my father told me that Edward had died, that I was Queen of England, I was frightened then. Terribly frightened. I believe I fainted.

TYLNEY. Poor dear.

JANE [*after a pause, sadly*]. Sometimes I'm afraid that . . . that they only use me as a rung in the ladder. [*Breaking off.*] Oh, but what does it matter? What does anything matter any more? You don't know what my life has been, Tylney. My books were my only solace, my only friends. . . .

TYLNEY. But, madam, you are still very young.

JANE. What do you mean?

TYLNEY. They say the Queen has a forgiving nature.

JANE. I'm seventeen; is that young? I don't look young, do I?

TYLNEY. You are tired now. If you could only sleep.

JANE. Where is my husband? Why can't I see him again? I only want to touch him . . . to feel his arms round me, to be sure, to be sure that he wanted me. I must beg her, implore her to let me see him. Perhaps she will understand, and have compassion on us. O God, if she spares us . . . we may be free to-morrow, in a few hours Guildford and I . . . we will go away into the country and forget, and begin life again, together. I think he loves me



enough for that. [*She moves from the window.*] Oh, Tylney, I don't understand. How strange a place the world is. I, who have never purposely hurt anyone in my life!

TYLNEY. You must put your trust in the Queen; she understands.

JANE. What?

TYLNEY. Your position, madam. How you have been used. How blameless you are.

JANE [*presses her hands to her forehead*]. I don't know. Am I less to be blamed than Guildford, or Northumberland, or my father . . . or the Archbishop? [*A silence.*] Listen . . . Listen!

TYLNEY. Madam?

JANE. Did you hear?

TYLNEY. What is it, madam?

JANE. I thought I heard footsteps.

TYLNEY [*listening*]. I hear nothing.

JANE. Someone is coming.

TYLNEY. I expect it's Mrs. Ellen. It can't mean that the Queen has arrived? And yet I told her. . . .

[*The door L. opens quickly and MRS. ELLEN, a second attendant to JANE, comes in, closing it behind her. She is younger than MRS. TYLNEY and obviously excited.*]

ELLEN. The Queen is here, madam! She is being received at Traitor's Gate!

TYLNEY. Where is she?

ELLEN. She was mounting the steps beneath St. Thomas's Tower.

[A roll of muffled drums is heard in the distance, and a herald of trumpets. ELLEN crosses to the window.]

She will be on the Green at any moment.

JANE. Please, you will both stay with me? Don't leave me alone.

TYLNEY. No, no.

JANE. This means everything in the world, or . . .

TYLNEY *[interrupting]*. Quickly, madam, there's your hair to be done.

JANE. Yes . . . my hair.

[They both exit R. ELLEN remains at the window and keeps them acquainted through the open door with what is going on below.]

ELLEN. She should have left the wharf now. . . . I expect she is passing under the gateway by the Hall Tower. Yes, I was right, here are her gentlemen, madam; they are walking by the row of beeches next to the wall which divides off her apartments. Now she has just entered through the arch leaning on my Lord's arm. He is telling her a joke, it seems; they are laughing a great deal. She is in fine humour, madam, God be praised; the Queen has a sour temper at times, I've heard. The gentlemen are waiting for her . . . she is joining them now, and . . . yes! They are coming across the grass, towards the Lieutenant's house. Oh, gracious! What high shoes she's wearing. She nearly fell then, if it hadn't been for my Lord's arm. *[She turns*

round.] My heart's beating so I can hardly stand up myself: Are you ready, madam?

[JANE enters, wearing a cap over her hair. She is still very pale, but she carries herself proudly.]

JANE. I have decided to meet the Queen alone.

ELLEN. Very well, madam. You won't need me, then?

JANE [smiling]. I won't need either of you. Return when the Queen has left.

ELLEN. Very well, madam.

[She kisses JANE'S hand and exits door up L.]

JANE. Tylney.

[TYLNEY enters holding a diamond pendant.]

TYLNEY. Coming, madam. Here is your diamond pendant. Let me put it on for you.

JANE. Do. I will feel Guildford is closer to me. He gave it to me.

TYLNEY. It's very pretty. [She puts it on JANE.]

JANE. Your fingers are trembling. Tylney, look at me. . . . Tell me, why tears?

TYLNEY. You're so wonderful, my lady.

JANE. Am I?

TYLNEY. So calm.

JANE. I'm not frightened now, it's all gone suddenly. While you were arranging my hair I was praying, and God has heard me, and comforted me, that's all. Our fate is in His hands, I can't struggle against it; indeed, I must not. You must go now.

TYLNEY [kissing her hand]. God bless you, madam!

JANE. God bless you!

[TYLNEY exits L. JANE stands motionless. Voices are heard outside the door, L.]

MARY [without]. Leave us, gentlemen. We shall not be long here.

[The door is opened for the QUEEN, and she stands for a moment on the threshold. Her lips are thin and down-turned, but her eyes are not unkind and easily light up with enthusiasm, or anger.]

Cousin Jane?

JANE. I am Jane Grey.

MARY [after a pause]. You have changed.

[MARY advances, carefully because of her high heels. The door is closed.]

[Considering her.] The daughter of my Duke of Suffolk. . . . I had not thought of my cousin like this. Quite beautiful too! [She laughs.] It's strange, our family has rarely been famed for good looks before. You may sit. Which relative is it who has been so generous? Not your father, surely?

JANE. You are pleased to jest, madam.

MARY. Tush! No doubt those charms are responsible for your fame. We can see our Lords have acted wisely; what hope have I against such a creature? Men are so susceptible to fine features.

JANE [protesting]. You are laughing at me. . . .

MARY. Troy was laid waste for Helen.

JANE. Have you no feeling?

MARY. Come, madam, I'm sorry to have to see you in such a place as this. You have been moved from the King's House?

JANE [*in a low voice*]. Yes. Does that mean . . . that it will be soon now?

MARY. I know nothing about it.

JANE. This window directly overlooks the place. Is that so that I can . . . prepare myself?

MARY [*frowns*]. I shall see that you are removed within a few days. Is that your wish?

JANE. It is my wish.

MARY. Very well, I shall instruct the Lieutenant. Were you happy in Leicestershire?

JANE. When I was learning; Doctor Aylmer was so patient and gentle. He made life seem so much more to me.

MARY. Your tutor?

JANE. Yes, madam.

MARY. We have heard of your great learning, Jane.

JANE. My father gave great care to my education.

MARY. Like my own, I think that is all I have to thank him for. He was very proud of my achievements. You speak in Latin, and Greek?

JANE. Oh, yes, I love them dearly.

MARY [*indicating the table*]. What are these papers here?

JANE. Some Hebrew I have been studying.

MARY. Hebrew too! [*Examining the papers.*] Do you know the tongue?

JANE. I wish I knew it better.

MARY. I see you write in Arabic.

JANE. A little, madam.

MARY. My mother was my first teacher in Latin. When I was nine I replied in that tongue to the commissioners sent from Flanders. I can see the King now . . . how proud he was . . . (*She sighs.*) Have you repented, child?

JANE. Have I sinned, madam?

MARY. Why are you here?

JANE. Because of man's ambition.

MARY. You answer with a brief tongue.

JANE. Oh, madam, can you think it was my own desire so far to reach above myself? Indeed, I dared not of my own accord. Such a position held nothing but terror for me.

MARY. I can believe you.

JANE. All that I could ask from life . . .

MARY. What is that?

JANE. My husband's love, I think that is all.

MARY. A woman's life is one of sacrifice, and for such worthless men. You love Guildford Dudley?

JANE [*simply*]. More than anyone in the world.

MARY. They say I should wed an English Lord and I say I will not. We shall see! There is not one I could care for; I know them too well. They are perverse, pig-headed fools! Yet you say you still love this . . . this man. The traitor who usurped our throne and set aside our Divine Right, as something of less importance than his own pride.

JANE. That fatal pride.

MARY. It is fatal to oppose God's will; people have discovered that and many more will discover it in the future. There are things which must be accomplished and which I

will accomplish . . . alone if need be. It is necessary to proceed cautiously now, but they will be done before I die. [*She turns to JANE.*] Why did you plead guilty?

JANE. I am not very strong.

MARY. They dared to threaten you?

JANE. I was afraid, perhaps.

MARY. Was that all? Your father told you to plead guilty? Answer me!

JANE. Oh, madam . . .

MARY. Answer me!

JANE. I am guilty.

MARY. Do you know where your father is now?

JANE. What have you done to him?

MARY. Do you care?

JANE. He is dead?

MARY. He deserved to be hanged like a common footpad.

JANE. What have you done?

MARY. I cannot understand you, Jane. He is not worth a moment's anxiety. That is why I have spared him. He is such a fool; I think he has been frightened enough.

JANE. You have spared my father?

MARY. He was shown the dungeons, and he has seen a man on the rack. I would not stain my shoe to crush a worm under foot.

JANE [*on her knees*]. Oh, God bless you! God bless you! Your mercy will be rewarded. [*Her voice faltering.*] Madam, there is something . . .

MARY. Well?

JANE. If you think me bold, I am only made so by your exceeding goodness. It urges me to hope, to believe .

that you will extend your compassion to . . . to the Archbishop Cranmer . . . [*The QUEEN starts.*] Oh, cousin, I beseech you to spare the old man.

MARY. I must have no heart.

JANE. But you are not heartless, you are not. You have shown me how great it is.

MARY [*touched*]. You are the first person to say that to me.

JANE. The Primate is old. . .

MARY. He is a traitor like the rest of you!

JANE. No, madam, he is not in entire possession of his strength. When he consented to my succession it was only after a long period in which he opposed it. He has given many years in devoted allegiance to the Crown. Oh, cousin, don't dishonour him in his old age; he was worn down, he feared for his life . . . don't let them kill him!

MARY. They cannot, without my consent.

JANE. Then have mercy on him; let his gratitude be added to mine, I implore you.

MARY. I shall see no hurt comes to him; that is all I can promise now.

JANE. You promise that? [*MARY nods.*]
But you are the Sovereign.

MARY [*sadly*]. I am only a woman, Jane. Ah, if I had been a man . . . everything would be so easy. I should command and dictate and make England glorious. I should throw off this heavy cloak of hypocrisy. I should be a slave to no living person, only to God.

JANE [*softly*]. Your people believe in you.

MARY. Do they? Do you think they do?

JANE. Yes.

MARY. But they don't understand. I am not a hard woman, and God knows my life has been hard. I must do these things if it breaks my heart. To restore our violated faith and unite, with bonds of steel, the two greatest countries in the world. That is my mission, and I have no wish to die with the certainty it has failed. [To JANE.] In a few days you will leave this prison-house, for ever.

JANE [*quietly, after a pause*]. I don't think I can die, as I ought to die, unless I see him again.

MARY. Your husband?

JANE. Yes. You see my life has been so empty; if there is no life after death . . . nothing, no afterwards . . . I . . . I couldn't bear it! It's all that I have left . . . that I will be with him in heaven.

MARY. My poor child, you need not be afraid.

JANE. I'm not really afraid, only . . . sometimes . . .

MARY. I mean you to go into life, not death.

JANE [*in a whisper*]. Life!

MARY. I pardon you, Jane.

JANE. Into life! Both of us!

MARY. I am satisfied of your innocence.

JANE. Both of us?

MARY [*evading the question*]. There is life waiting for you, full of sunshine, and joy, beautiful things . . . and children.

JANE. Oh, madam . . . madam! [*With shaking hands she raises the hem of the QUEEN'S skirt to her lips.*] My happiness . . . I can't express it. I feel . . . it's so great . . . it won't let me speak.

MARY [*tenderly*]. I understand. There is no cause for you to kneel.

JANE. We shall pray for you and bless you . . . in every prayer of our lives.

MARY. Remember me, when you are happy, will you?

JANE. Always.

MARY. I shall need all your prayers. It is hard . . . it is so hard sometimes, to do my duty. I wish I were finished with it all, but I must go onwards. [*She rises.*] Duty comes before everything. Everything. I must leave you. I have been too long already.

JANE. Must you . . . must you go?

MARY [*nods*]. Duty compels me; it has been like that, always. Farewell.

[*She moves away, and turns for a moment at the door.* Be wise, Jane. [*Off stage.*] Your arm, my Lord, please. I tire so quickly now.

[*The door closes. JANE remains on her knees crying quietly for several minutes. When she rises she walks across to the window. The roll of drums is heard again. TYLNEY comes in, L. She has just heard some fateful message, which she does not know, at first, how to impart to her mistress.*

JANE [*without looking up*]. Is that you, Tylney?

TYLNEY. Yes, madam.

JANE. Dear Tylney . . . you have been so kind to me. So few people have been kind in my life. [*She takes her hands.*] Why do you look so pale? And . . . yes, there are still tears in your eyes.

TYLNEY [*in a strained voice*]. The Queen . . .

JANE. You do care for me, don't you?

TYLNEY. Oh, madam, very greatly.

JANE. Then why are there tears?

TYLNEY. She has pardoned you? I knew.

JANE. Both of us! I can't believe it yet, I can't believe it. I'm not sure . . . that I'm not asleep really. It may only be a dream.

TYLNEY. Perhaps you are . . . asleep.

JANE. If I am dreaming, don't wake me. Please don't wake me. [*With her arms around TYLNEY'S neck.*] Oh, Tylney, we are free . . . free, don't you understand? I won't be here any more. I don't like this room, it's full of ghosts.

TYLNEY. Madam, listen . . .

JANE [*in ecstasy*]. She said in a few days, only a few days more. How can I live till then? Guildford, Guildford, I wish I were with you now. Don't you realise what this means? It means life together . . . it means we can walk under the sky, and hear the birds again; it means you.

TYLNEY [*anguished*]. Oh, madam, don't! I have something I must tell you at once. [*JANE turns slowly.*]

JANE. Tylney, what is the matter with you? What are you saying?

TYLNEY. Oh, my dear lady . . . the news has just been brought.

JANE [*in sudden terror*]. My God! What is it? What is it?

TYLNEY. Your father has joined the conspirators!

JANE. My father . . .

TYLNEY. Against Her Majesty. He and Sir Thomas Wyatt have occupied Rochester with their men. They have issued a proclamation . . . against the Queen's marriage.

JANE [*after a long pause*]. It's not true. It's not true! It's a false report. . . . He couldn't! I won't believe it!

TYLNEY. God forgive them, it is the truth. I heard it from the messenger myself.

JANE. He was lying!

TYLNEY. I fear . . .

JANE [*almost voiceless*]. God wouldn't do this to me?

TYLNEY. Everywhere they are rising against her, and joining Sir Thomas. They say he will march on London. It's revolution!

JANE. Revolution!

TYLNEY. We thought you should be told, now.

JANE [*her voice breaking*]. Yes . . . yes, that was right. But what have I done? What have I done to deserve this? Does she know . . . did she know?

TYLNEY [*shakes her head*]. Not yet.

[*JANE has gone very white; she realises this move has sealed her fate. The roll of drums is heard again, very faintly. TYLNEY bursts into tears.*]

JANE. Then this is the end. . . . I think it was too wonderful to be true. I was born to suffer, but . . . this is hurting so.

[*The drums are heard more loudly. She suddenly puts her arms around TYLNEY'S shoulders.*]

Oh, no, Tylney . . . you mustn't cry, you mustn't cry, for my sake. Look! Such a beautiful sunset . . . there must

be a God to create that. Death holds no terror for me now, I know life won't end with the grave, in darkness. There is a great glory shining behind the clouds. . . . I feel no pain . . . my Spirit will spring rejoicing into the Eternal Light, where I hope the mercy of God will receive it.

CURTAIN



THE BOY COMES HOME

A COMEDY IN ONE ACT

By A. A. MILNE



CHARACTERS

UNCLE JAMES.

AUNT EMILY.

PHILIP.

MARY.

MRS. HIGGINS.



THE BOY COMES HOME

SCENE: *A room in UNCLE JAMES'S house in the Cromwell Road.*

TIME: *The day after the War.*

Any room in UNCLE JAMES'S house is furnished in heavy mid-Victorian style: this particular morning-room is perhaps solider and more respectable even than the others, from the heavy table in the middle of it to the heavy engravings on the walls. There are two doors to it. The one at the back opens into the hall, the one at the side into the dining-room.

PHILIP comes in from the hall and goes into the dining-room. Apparently he finds nothing there, for he returns to the morning-room, looks about him for a moment and then rings the bell. It is ten o'clock, and he wants his breakfast. He picks up the paper, and sits in a heavy armchair in front of the fire—a pleasant-looking well-built person of twenty-three, with an air of decisiveness about him. MARY, the parlour-maid, comes in.

MARY. Did you ring, Master Philip?

PHILIP [*absently*]. Yes: I want some breakfast, please, Mary.

MARY [*coldly*]. Breakfast has been cleared away an hour ago.

PHILIP. Exactly. That's why I rang. You can boil me a couple of eggs or something. And coffee, not tea.



MARY. I'm sure I don't know what Mrs. Higgins will say?

PHILIP [*getting up*]. Who is Mrs. Higgins?

MARY. The cook. And she's not used to being put about like this.

PHILIP. Do you think she'll say something?

MARY. I don't know *what* she'll say.

PHILIP. You needn't tell me, you know, if you don't want to. Anyway, I don't suppose it will shock me. One gets used to it in the Army. [*He smiles pleasantly at her.*]

MARY. Well, I'll do what I can, sir. But breakfast at eight sharp is the master's rule, just as it used to be before you went away to the war.

PHILIP. Before I went away to the war I did a lot of silly things. Don't drag them up now. [*More curtly*] Two eggs, and if there's a ham bring that along too.

[*He turns away.*]

MARY [*doubtfully, as she prepares to go*]. Well, I'm sure I don't know what Mrs. Higgins will say.

[*As she goes out she makes way for AUNT EMILY to come in, a kind-hearted mid-Victorian lady who has never had any desire for the vote.*]

EMILY. There you are, Philip! Good morning, dear. Did you sleep well?

PHILIP. Rather; splendidly, thanks, Aunt Emily. How are you? [*He kisses her.*]

EMILY. And did you have a good breakfast? Naughty boy to be late for it. I always thought they had to get up so early in the Army.

PHILIP. They do. That's why they're so late when they get out of the Army.

EMILY. Dear me! I should have thought a habit of four years would have stayed with you.

PHILIP. Every morning for four years, as I've shot out of bed, I've said to myself, "Wait! A time will come." [*Smiling*] That doesn't really give a habit a chance.

EMILY. Well, I daresay you wanted your sleep out. I was so afraid that a really cosy bed would keep you awake after all those years in the trenches.

PHILIP. Well, one isn't in the trenches all the time. And one gets leave—if one's an officer.

EMILY [*reproachfully*]. You didn't spend much of it with us, Philip.

PHILIP [*taking her hands*]. I know; but you did understand, didn't you, dear?

EMILY. We're not very gay, and I know you must have wanted gaiety for the little time you had. But I think your Uncle James felt it. After all, dear, you've lived with us for some years, and he is your guardian.

PHILIP. I know. You've been a darling to me always, Aunt Emily. But [*awkwardly*] Uncle James and I——

EMILY. Of course, he is a *little* difficult to get on with. I'm more used to him. But I'm sure he really is very fond of you, Philip.

PHILIP. H'm! I always used to be frightened of him. . . . I suppose he's just the same. He seemed just the same last night—and he still has breakfast at eight o'clock. Been making pots of money, I suppose?



EMILY. He never tells me exactly, but he did speak once about the absurdity of the excess-profits tax. You see, jam is a thing the Army wants.

PHILIP. It certainly gets it.

EMILY. It was so nice for him, because it made him feel he was doing his bit, helping the poor men in the trenches.

Enter MARY

MARY. Mrs. Higgins wishes to speak to you, ma'am.

[She looks at PHILIP as much as to say, "There you are!"]

EMILY *[getting up]*. Yes, I'll come. *[To PHILIP]* I think I'd better just see what she wants, Philip.

PHILIP *[firmly to MARY]*. Tell Mrs. Higgins to come here. *[MARY hesitates and looks at her mistress.]* At once, please. *[Exit MARY.]*

EMILY *[upset]*. Philip, dear, I don't know what Mrs. Higgins will say——

PHILIP. No; nobody seems to. I thought we might really find out for once.

EMILY *[going towards the door]*. Perhaps I'd better go——

PHILIP *[putting his arm round her waist]*. Oh no, you mustn't. You see, she really wants to see me.

EMILY. You?

PHILIP. Yes; I ordered breakfast five minutes ago.

EMILY. Philip! My poor boy! Why didn't you tell me? And I daresay I could have got it for you. Though I don't know what Mrs. Higgins——

[An extremely angry voice is heard outside, and MRS. HIGGINS, stout and aggressive, comes in.]



MRS. HIGGINS [*truculently*]. You sent for me, ma'am?

EMILY [*nervously*]. Yes—er—I think if you—perhaps—

PHILIP [*calmly*]. I sent for you, Mrs. Higgins. I want some breakfast. Didn't Mary tell you?

MRS. HIGGINS. Breakfast is at eight o'clock. It always has been as long as I've been in this house, and always will be until I get further orders.

PHILIP. Well, you've just got further orders. Two eggs, and if there's a ham—

MRS. HIGGINS. Orders. We're talking about orders. From whom in this house do I take orders, may I ask?

PHILIP. In this case from me.

MRS. HIGGINS [*playing her trump-card*]. In that case, ma'am, I wish to give a month's notice from to-day. *Inclusive*.

PHILIP [*quickly, before his aunt can say anything*]. Certainly. In fact, you'd probably prefer it if my aunt gave *you* notice, and then you could go at once. We can easily arrange that. [*To AUNT EMILY as he takes out a fountain-pen and cheque-book*] What do you pay her?

EMILY [*faintly*]. Forty-five pounds.

PHILIP [*writing on his knee*]. Twelves into forty-five . . . [*Pleasantly to MRS. HIGGINS, but without looking up*] I hope you don't mind a Cox's cheque. Some people do; but this is quite a good one. [*Tearing it out*] Here you are.

MRS. HIGGINS [*taken aback*]. What's this?

PHILIP. Your wages instead of notice. Now you can go at once.

MRS. HIGGINS. Who said anything about going?

PHILIP [*surprised*]. I'm sorry; I thought *you* did.

MRS. HIGGINS. If it's only a bit of breakfast, I don't say but what I mightn't get it, if I'm asked decent.

PHILIP [*putting back the cheque*]. Then let me say again, "Two eggs, ham and coffee." And Mary can bring the ham up at once, and I'll get going on that. [*Turning away*] Thanks very much.

MRS. HIGGINS. Well, I—well—well! [*Exit speechless.*]

PHILIP [*surprised*]. Is that all she ever says? It isn't much to worry about.

EMILY. Philip, how could you! I should have been terrified.

PHILIP. Well, you see, I've done your job for two years out there.

EMILY. What job?

PHILIP. Mess President. . . . I think I'll go and see about that ham.

[*He smiles at her and goes out into the dining-room. AUNT EMILY wanders round the room, putting a few things tidy as is her habit, when she is interrupted by the entrance of UNCLE JAMES. JAMES is not a big man, nor an impressive one in his black morning-coat; and his thin straggly beard, now going grey, does not hide a chin of any great power; but he has a severity which passes for strength with the weak.*]

JAMES. Philip down yet?

EMILY. He's just having his breakfast.



JAMES [*looking at his watch*]. Ten o'clock. [*Snapping it shut and putting it back*] Ten o'clock. I say ten o'clock, Emily.

EMILY. Yes, dear, I heard you.

JAMES. You don't say anything?

EMILY [*vaguely*]. I expect he's tired after that long war.

JAMES. That's no excuse for not being punctual. I suppose he learnt punctuality in the Army?

EMILY. I expect he learnt it, James, but I understood him to say that he'd forgotten it.

JAMES. Then the sooner he learns it again the better. I particularly stayed away from the office to-day in order to talk things over with him, and [*looking at his watch*] here's ten o'clock—past ten—and no sign of him. I'm practically throwing away a day.

EMILY. What are you going to talk to him about?

JAMES. His future, naturally. I have decided that the best thing he can do is to come into the business at once.

EMILY. Are you really going to talk it over with him, James, or are you just going to tell him that he *must* come?

JAMES [*surprised*]. What do you mean? What's the difference? Naturally we shall talk it over first, and—er—naturally he'll fall in with my wishes.

EMILY. I suppose he can hardly help himself, poor boy.

JAMES. Not until he's twenty-five, anyhow. When he's twenty-five he can have his own money and do what he likes with it.

EMILY [*timidly*]. But I think you ought to consult him a little, dear. After all, he *has* been fighting for us.

JAMES [*with his back to the fire*]. Now that's the sort of silly sentiment that there's been much too much of. I object to it strongly. I don't want to boast, but I think I may claim to have done my share. I gave up my nephew to my country, and I—er—suffered from the shortage of potatoes to an extent that you probably didn't realize. Indeed, if it hadn't been for your fortunate discovery about that time that you didn't really like potatoes, I don't know how we should have carried on. And, as I think I've told you before, the excess-profits tax seemed to me a singularly stupid piece of legislation—but I paid it. And I don't go boasting about how much I paid.

EMILY [*unconvinced*]. Well, I think that Philip's four years out there have made him more of a man; he doesn't seem somehow like a boy who can be told what to do. I'm sure they've taught him something.

JAMES. I've no doubt that they've taught him something about—er—bombs and—er—which end a revolver goes off, and how to form fours. But I don't see that that sort of thing helps him to decide upon the most suitable career for a young man in after-war conditions.

EMILY. Well, I can only say you'll find him different.

JAMES. I didn't notice any particular difference last night.

EMILY. I think you'll find him rather more—I can't quite think of the word, but Mrs. Higgins could tell you what I mean.

JAMES. Of course, if he likes to earn his living any other way, he may; but I don't see how he proposes to do it so long as I hold the purse-strings. [*Looking at his*



watch] Perhaps you'd better tell him that I cannot wait any longer.

[*EMILY opens the door leading into the dining-room and talks through it to PHILIP.*

EMILY. Philip, your uncle is waiting to see you before he goes to the office. Will you be long, dear?

PHILIP [*from the dining-room*]. Is he in a hurry?

JAMES [*shortly*]. Yes.

EMILY. He says he *is* rather, dear.

PHILIP. Couldn't he come and talk in here? It wouldn't interfere with my breakfast.

JAMES. No.

EMILY. He says he'd rather you came to *him*, darling.

PHILIP [*resigned*]. Oh, well.

EMILY [*to JAMES*]. He'll be here directly, dear. Just sit down in front of the fire and make yourself comfortable with the paper. He won't keep you long.

[*She arranges him.*

JAMES [*taking the paper*]. The morning is not the time to make oneself comfortable. It's a most dangerous habit. I nearly found myself dropping off in front of the fire just now. I don't like this hanging about, wasting the day.

[*He opens the paper.*

EMILY. You should have had a nice sleep, dear, while you could. We were up so late last night listening to Philip's stories.

JAMES. Yes, yes. [*He begins a yawn and stifles it hurriedly.*] You mustn't neglect your duties, Emily. I've no doubt you have plenty to do.

EMILY. All right, James, then I'll leave you. But don't be hard on the boy.

JAMES [*sleepily*]. I shall be just, Emily; you can rely upon that.

EMILY [*going to the door*]. I don't think that's quite what I meant. [*She goes out.*]

[JAMES, *who is now quite comfortable, begins to nod. He wakes up with a start, turns over the paper, and nods again. Soon he is breathing deeply with closed eyes.*]

* * *

PHILIP [*coming in*]. Sorry to have kept you waiting, but I was a bit late for breakfast. [*He takes out his pipe.*] Are we going to talk business or what?

JAMES [*taking out his watch*]. A bit late! I make it just two hours.

PHILIP [*pleasantly*]. All right, Uncle James. Call it two hours late. Or twenty-two hours early for to-morrow's breakfast, if you like.

[*He sits down in a chair on the opposite side of the table from his uncle, and lights his pipe.*]

JAMES. You smoke now?

PHILIP [*staggered*]. I what?

JAMES [*nodding at his pipe*]. You smoke?

PHILIP. Good heavens! what do you think we *did* in France?



JAMES. Before you start smoking all over the house, I should have thought you would have asked your aunt's permission.

[PHILIP looks at him in amazement, and then goes to the door.]

PHILIP [*calling*]. Aunt Emily! . . . Aunt Emily! . . . Do you mind my smoking in here?

AUNT EMILY [*from upstairs*]. Of course not, darling.

PHILIP [*to JAMES, as he returns to his chair*]. Of course not, darling. [*He puts back his pipe in his mouth.*]

JAMES. Now, understand once and for all, Philip, while you remain in my house I expect not only punctuality, but also civility and respect. I will *not* have impertinence.

PHILIP [*unimpressed*]. Well, that's what I want to talk to you about, Uncle James. About staying in your house, I mean.

JAMES. I don't know what you do mean.

PHILIP. Well, we don't get on too well together, and I thought perhaps I'd better take rooms somewhere. You could give me an allowance until I came into my money. Or I suppose you could give me the money now if you really liked. I don't quite know how father left it to me.

JAMES [*coldly*]. You come into your money when you are twenty-five. Your father very wisely felt that to trust a large sum to a mere boy of twenty-one was simply putting temptation in his way. Whether I have the power or not to alter his dispositions, I certainly don't propose to do so.

PHILIP. If it comes to that, I *am* twenty-five.



JAMES. Indeed? I had an impression that that event took place in about two years' time. When did you become twenty-five, may I ask?

PHILIP [*quietly*]. It was on the Somme. We were attacking the next day and my company was in support. We were in a so-called trench on the edge of a wood—a damned rotten place to be, and we got hell. The company commander sent back to ask if we could move. The C.O. said, "Certainly not; hang on." We hung on; doing nothing, you know—just hanging on and waiting for the next day. Of course, the Boche knew all about that. He had it on us nicely. . . . [*Sadly*] Poor old Billy! he was one of the best—our company commander, you know. They got him, poor devil! That left *me* in command of the company. I sent a runner back to ask if I could move. Well, I'd had a bit of a scout on my own and found a sort of trench five hundred yards to the right. Not what *you'd* call a trench, of course, but compared to that wood—well, it was absolutely Hyde Park. I described the position and asked if I could go there. My man never came back. I waited an hour and sent another man. He went west too. Well, I wasn't going to send a third. It was murder. So I had to decide. We'd lost about half the company by this time, you see. Well, there were three things I could do—hang on, move to this other trench, against orders, or go back myself and explain the situation. . . . I moved. . . . And then I went back to the C.O. and told him I'd moved. . . . And then I went back to the company again. . . . [*Quietly*] That was when I became twenty-five . . . or thirty-five . . . or forty-five.

JAMES [*recovering himself with an effort*]. Ah yes, yes. [*He coughs awkwardly.*] No doubt points like that fre-



quently crop up in the trenches. I am glad that you did well out there, and I'm sure your Colonel would speak kindly of you; but when it comes to choosing a career for you now that you have left the Army, my advice is not altogether to be despised. Your father evidently thought so, or he would not have entrusted you to my care.

PHILIP. My father didn't foresee this war.

JAMES. Yes, yes, but you make too much of this war. All you young boys seem to think you've come back from France to teach us our business. You'll find that it is you who'll have to learn, not we.

PHILIP. I'm quite prepared to learn; in fact I want to.

JAMES. Excellent. Then we can consider that settled.

PHILIP. Well, we haven't settled yet what business I'm going to learn.

JAMES. I don't think that's very difficult. I propose to take you into my business. You'll start at the bottom, of course, but it will be a splendid opening for you.

PHILIP [*thoughtfully*]. I see. So you've decided it for me? The jam business.

JAMES [*sharply*]. Is there anything to be ashamed of in that?

PHILIP. Oh no, nothing at all. Only it doesn't happen to appeal to me.

JAMES. If you knew which side your bread was buttered, it would appeal to you very considerably.

PHILIP. I'm afraid I can't see the butter for the jam.

JAMES. I don't want any silly jokes of that sort. You were glad enough to get it out there, I've no doubt.

PHILIP. Oh yes. Perhaps that's why I'm so sick of it now. . . . No, it's no good, Uncle James; you must think of something else.

JAMES [*with a sneer*]. Perhaps *you've* thought of something else?

PHILIP. Well, I had some idea of being an architect—

JAMES. You propose to start learning to be an architect at twenty-three?

PHILIP [*smiling*]. Well, I couldn't start before, could I?

JAMES. Exactly. And now you'll find it's too late.

PHILIP. Is it? Aren't there going to be any more architects, or doctors, or solicitors, or barristers? Because we've all lost four years of our lives, are all the professions going to die out?

JAMES. And how old do you suppose you'll be before you're earning money as an architect?

PHILIP. The usual time, whatever that may be. If I'm four years behind, so is everybody else.

JAMES. Well, I think it's high time you began to earn a living at once.

PHILIP. Look here, Uncle James, do you really think that you can treat me like a boy who's just left school? Do you think four years at the front have made no difference at all?

JAMES. If there had been any difference, I should have expected it to take the form of an increased readiness to obey orders and recognize authority.

PHILIP [*regretfully*]. You are evidently determined to have a row. Perhaps I had better tell you once and for all



that I refuse to go into the turnip and vegetable marrow business.

JAMES [*thumping the table angrily*]. And perhaps I'd better tell you, sir, once and for all, that I don't propose to allow rudeness from an impertinent young puppy.

PHILIP [*reminiscently*]. I remember annoying our Brigadier once. He was covered with red, had a very red face, about twenty medals, and a cold blue eye. He told me how angry he was for about five minutes while I stood to attention. I'm afraid you aren't nearly so impressive, Uncle James.

JAMES [*rather upset*]. Oh! [*Recovering himself*] Fortunately I have other means of impressing you. The power of the purse goes a long way in this world. I propose to use it.

PHILIP. I see. . . . Yes . . . that's rather awkward, isn't it?

JAMES [*pleasantly*]. I think you'll find it very awkward.

PHILIP [*thoughtfully*]. Yes.

[*With an amused laugh JAMES settles down to his paper as if the interview were over.*]

PHILIP [*to himself*]. I suppose I shall have to think of another argument.

[*He takes out a revolver from his pocket and fondles it affectionately.*]

JAMES [*looking up suddenly as he is doing this—amazed*]. What on earth are you doing?

PHILIP. Souvenir from France. Do you know, Uncle James, that this revolver has killed about twenty Germans?



JAMES [*shortly*]. Oh! Well, don't go playing about with it here, or you'll be killing Englishmen before you know where you are.

PHILIP. Well, you never know. [*He raises it leisurely and points it at his uncle.*] It's a nice little weapon.

JAMES [*angrily*]. Put it down, sir. You ought to have grown out of monkey tricks like that in the Army. You ought to know better than to point an unloaded revolver at anybody. That's the way accidents always happen.

PHILIP. Not when you've been on a revolver course and know all about it. Besides, it is loaded.

JAMES [*very angry because he is frightened suddenly*]. Put it down at once, sir. [*PHILIP turns it away from him and examines it carelessly.*] What's the matter with you? Have you gone mad suddenly?

PHILIP [*mildly*]. I thought you'd be interested in it. It's shot such a lot of Germans.

JAMES. Well, it won't want to shoot any more, and the sooner you get rid of it the better.

PHILIP. I wonder. Does it ever occur to you, Uncle James, that there are about a hundred thousand people in England who own revolvers, who are quite accustomed to them and—who have nobody to practise on now?

JAMES. No, sir, it certainly doesn't.

PHILIP [*thoughtfully*]. I wonder if it will make any difference. You know, one gets so used to potting at people. It's rather difficult to realize suddenly that one oughtn't to.

JAMES [*getting up*]. I don't know what the object of all this tomfoolery is, if it has one. But you understand



that I expect you to come to the office with me to-morrow at nine o'clock. Kindly see that you're punctual.

[He turns to go away.]

PHILIP *[softly]*. Uncle James.

JAMES *[over his shoulder]*. I have no more——

PHILIP *[in his parade voice]*. Damn it, sir! stand to attention when you talk to an officer! *[JAMES instinctively turns round and stiffens himself.]* That's better; you can sit down if you like.

[He motions JAMES to his chair with the revolver.]

JAMES *[going nervously to his chair]*. What does this bluff mean?

PHILIP. It isn't bluff, it's quite serious. *[Pointing the revolver at his uncle]* Do sit down.

JAMES *[sitting down]*. Threats, eh?

PHILIP. Persuasion.

JAMES. At the point of the revolver? You settle your arguments by force? Good heavens, sir! this is just the very thing that we were fighting to put down.

PHILIP. *We* were fighting! *We!* *We!* Uncle, you're a humorist.

JAMES. Well, "you," if you prefer it. Although those of us who stayed at home——

PHILIP. Yes, never mind about the excess profits now. I can tell you quite well what we fought for. We used force to put down force. That's what I'm doing now. You were going to use force—the force of money—to make me do what you wanted. Now I'm using force to stop it.

[He levels the revolver again.]

JAMES. You're—you're going to shoot your old uncle?



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PHILIP. Why not? I've shot lots of old uncles—Landsturmiers.

JAMES. But those were Germans! It's different shooting Germans. You're in England now. You couldn't have a crime on your conscience like that.

PHILIP. Ah, but you mustn't think that after four years of war one has quite the same ideas about the sanctity of human life. How could one?

JAMES. You'll find that juries have kept pretty much the same ideas, I fancy.

PHILIP. Yes, but revolvers often go off accidentally. You said so yourself. This is going to be the purest accident. Can't you see it in the papers? "The deceased's nephew, who was obviously upset——"

JAMES. I suppose you think it's brave to come back from the front and threaten a defenceless man with a revolver? Is that the sort of fair play they teach you in the Army?

PHILIP. Good heavens! of course it is. You don't think that you wait until the other side has got just as many guns as you before you attack? You're really rather lucky. Strictly speaking, I ought to have thrown half a dozen bombs at you first. [*Taking one out of his pocket*] As it happens, I've only got one.

JAMES [*thoroughly alarmed*]. Put that back at once.

PHILIP [*putting down the revolver and taking it in his hands*]. You hold it in the right hand—so—taking care to keep the lever down. Then you take the pin in the finger—so, and—but perhaps this doesn't interest you?

JAMES [*edging his chair away*]. Put it down at once, sir. Good heavens! anything might happen.

PHILIP [*putting it down and taking up the revolver again*]. Does it ever occur to you, Uncle James, that there are about three million people in England who know all about bombs, and how to throw them, and——

JAMES. It certainly does not occur to me. I should never dream of letting these things occur to me.

PHILIP [*looking at the bomb regretfully*]. It's rather against my principles as a soldier, but just to make things a bit more fair—[*generously*] you shall have it.

[*He holds it out to him suddenly.*]

JAMES [*shrinking back again*]. Certainly not, sir. It might go off at any moment.

PHILIP [*putting it back in his pocket*]. Oh no; it's quite useless; there's no detonator. . . . [*Sternly*] Now, then, let's talk business.

JAMES. What do you want me to do?

PHILIP. Strictly speaking, you should be holding your hands over your head and saying "Kamerad!" However, I'll let you off that. All I ask from you is that you should be reasonable.

JAMES. And if I refuse, you'll shoot me?

PHILIP. Well, I don't quite know, Uncle James. I expect we should go through this little scene again to-morrow. You haven't enjoyed it, have you? Well, there's lots more of it to come. We'll rehearse it every day. One day, if you go on being unreasonable, the thing will go off. Of course, you think that I shouldn't have the pluck to fire. But you can't be quite certain. It's a hundred to one that I shan't—only I might. Fear—it's a horrible thing. Elderly men die of it sometimes.

JAMES. Pooh! I'm not to be bluffed like that.

PHILIP [*suddenly*]. You're quite right; you're not that sort. I made a mistake. [*Aiming carefully*] I shall have to do it straight off, after all. One—two——

JAMES [*on his knees, with uplifted hands, in an agony of terror*]. Philip! Mercy! What are your terms?

PHILIP [*picking him up by the scruff, and helping him into the chair*]. Good man, that's the way to talk. I'll get them for you. Make yourself comfortable in front of the fire till I come back. Here's the paper.

[*He gives his uncle the paper, and goes out into the hall.*]

* * *

[JAMES opens his eyes with a start and looks round him in a bewildered way. He rubs his head, takes out his watch and looks at it, and then stares round the room again. The door from the dining-room opens, and PHILIP comes in with a piece of toast in his hand.]

PHILIP [*his mouth full*]. You wanted to see me, Uncle James?

JAMES [*still bewildered*]. That's all right, my boy, that's all right. What have you been doing?

PHILIP [*surprised*]. Breakfast. [*Putting the last piece in his mouth*] Rather late, I'm afraid.

JAMES. That's all right. [*He laughs awkwardly*]

PHILIP. Anything the matter? You don't look your usual bright self.

JAMES. I—er—seem to have dropped asleep in front of the fire. Most unusual thing for me to have done. Most unusual.

PHILIP. Let that be a lesson to you not to get up so early. Of course, if you're in the Army you can't help yourself. Thank heaven I'm out of it, and my own master again.

JAMES. Ah, that's what I wanted to talk to you about. Sit down, Philip. [*He indicates the chair by the fire.*]

PHILIP [*taking a chair by the table*]. You have that, uncle; I shall be all right here.

JAMES [*hastily*]. No, no; you come here. [*He gives PHILIP the armchair and sits by the table himself.*] I should be dropping off again. [*He laughs awkwardly.*]

PHILIP. Righto.

[*He puts his hand in his pocket. UNCLE JAMES shivers and looks at him in horror. PHILIP brings out his pipe, and a sickly grin of relief comes into JAMES's face.*]

JAMES. I suppose you smoked a lot in France?

PHILIP. Rather! Nothing else to do. It's allowed in here?

JAMES [*hastily*]. Yes, yes, of course. [*PHILIP lights his pipe.*] Well now, Philip, what are you going to do, now you've left the Army?

PHILIP [*promptly*]. Burn my uniform and sell my revolver.

JAMES [*starting at the word "revolver"*]. Sell your revolver, eh?

PHILIP [*surprised*]. Well, I don't want it now, do I?

JAMES. No. . . . Oh no. . . . Oh, most certainly not, I should say. Oh, I can't see why you should want it at all. [*With an uneasy laugh*] You're in England now. No need for revolvers here—eh?

PHILIP [*staring at him*]. Well, no, I hope not.

JAMES [*hastily*]. Quite so. Well now, Philip, what next? We must find a profession for you.

PHILIP [*yawning*]. I suppose so. I haven't really thought about it much.

JAMES. You never wanted to be an architect?

PHILIP [*surprised*]. Architect?

[JAMES *rubs his head and wonders what made him think of architect.*

JAMES. Or anything like that.

PHILIP. It's a bit late, isn't it?

JAMES. Well, if you're four years behind, so is everybody else. [*He feels vaguely that he has heard this argument before.*]

PHILIP [*smiling*]. To tell the truth, I don't feel I mind much anyway. Anything you like—except a commissionaire. I absolutely refuse to wear uniform again.

JAMES. How would you like to come into the business?

PHILIP. The jam business? Well, I don't know. You wouldn't want me to salute you in the mornings?

JAMES. My dear boy, no!

PHILIP. All right, I'll try it if you like. I don't know if I shall be any good—what do you do?

JAMES. It's your experience in managing and—er—handling men which I hope will be of value.

PHILIP. Oh, I can do that all right. [*Stretching himself luxuriously*] Uncle James, do you realize that I'm never going to salute again, or wear a uniform, or get wet—really wet, I mean—or examine men's feet, or stand to attention when I'm spoken to, or—oh, lots more things?

And best of all, I'm never going to be frightened again. Have you ever known what it is to be afraid—really afraid?

JAMES [*embarrassed*]. I—er—well—— [*He coughs.*]

PHILIP. No, you couldn't—not really afraid of death, I mean. Well, that's over now. Good lord! I could spend the rest of my life in the British Museum and be happy. . . .

JAMES [*getting up*]. All right, we'll try you in the office. I expect you want a holiday first, though.

PHILIP [*getting up*]. My dear uncle, this is holiday. Being in London is holiday. Buying an evening paper—wearing a waistcoat again—running after a bus—anything—it's all holiday.

JAMES. All right, then, come along with me now, and I'll introduce you to Mr. Bamford.

PHILIP. Right. Who's he?

JAMES. Our manager. A little stiff, but a very good fellow. He'll be delighted to hear that you are coming into the firm.

PHILIP [*smiling*]. Perhaps I'd better bring my revolver, in case he isn't.

JAMES [*laughing with forced heartiness as they go together to the door*]. Ha, ha! A good joke that! Ha, ha, ha! A good joke—but only a joke, of course. Ha, ha! He, he, he!

[*PHILIP goes out. JAMES, following him, turns at the door, and looks round the room in a bewildered way. Was it a dream, or wasn't it? He will never be quite certain.*]

CURTAIN



THE RISING OF THE MOON

BY LADY GREGORY



CHARACTERS

SERGEANT

POLICEMAN X

POLICEMAN B

A RAGGED MAN



THE RISING OF THE MOON

SCENE : *Side of a quay in a seaport town. Some posts and chains. A large barrel. Enter three POLICEMEN. Moonlight.*

[SERGEANT, who is older than the others, crosses the stage to R. and looks down steps. The others put down a pastepot and unroll a bundle of placard.

POLICEMAN B. I think this would be a good place to put up a notice. [He points to barrel.

POLICEMAN X. Better ask him. [Calls to SERGEANT.] Will this be a good place for a placard? [No answer.

POLICEMAN B. Will we put up a notice here on the barrel? [No answer.

SERGEANT. There's a flight of steps here that leads to the water. This is a place that should be minded well. If he got down here, his friends might have a boat to meet him; they might send it in here from outside.

POLICEMAN B. Would the barrel be a good place to put a notice up?

SERGEANT. It might; you can put it there.

[They paste the notice up.

SERGEANT [reading it]. Dark hair—dark eyes, smooth face, height five feet five—there's not much to take hold of in that—it's a pity I had no chance of seeing him before he broke out of gaol. They say he's a wonder, that it's he makes



all the plans for the whole organization. There isn't another man in Ireland would have broken gaol the way he did. He must have some friends among the gaolers.

POLICEMAN B. A hundred pounds is little enough for the Government to offer for him. You may be sure any man in the force that takes him will get promotion.

SERGEANT. I'll mind this place myself. I wouldn't wonder at all if he came this way. He might come slipping along there [*points to side of quay*], and his friends might be waiting for him there [*points down steps*], and once he got away it's little chance we'd have of finding him; it's maybe under a load of kelp he'd be in a fishing boat, and not one to help a married man that wants it to the reward.

POLICEMAN X. And if we get him itself, nothing but abuse on our heads for it from the people, and maybe from our own relations.

SERGEANT. Well, we have to do our duty in the force. Haven't we the whole country depending on us to keep law and order? It's those that are down would be up and those that are up would be down, if it wasn't for us. Well, hurry on, you have plenty of other places to placard yet, and come back here then to me. You can take the lantern. Don't be too long now. It's very lonesome here with nothing but the moon.

POLICEMAN B. It's a pity we can't stop with you. The Government should have brought more police into the town, with *him* in gaol, and at assize time too. Well, good luck to your watch. [*They go out.*]

SERGEANT [*walks up and down once or twice and looks at placard*]. A hundred pounds and promotion sure. There

must be a great deal of spending in a hundred pounds. It's a pity some honest man not to be the better of that.

[A RAGGED MAN appears at left and tries to slip past.

SERGEANT suddenly turns.

SERGEANT. Where are you going?

MAN. I'm a pcor ballad-singer, your honour. I thought to sell some of these [*holds out bundle of ballads*] to the sailors. [*He goes on.*

SERGEANT. Stop! Didn't I tell you to stop? You can't go on there.

MAN. Oh, very well. It's a hard thing to be poor. All the world's against the poor!

SERGEANT. Who are you?

MAN. You'd be as wise as myself if I told you, but I don't mind. I'm one Jimmy Walsh, a ballad-singer.

SERGEANT. Jimmy Walsh? I don't know that name.

MAN. Ah, sure, they know it well enough in Ennis. Were you ever in Ennis, Sergeant?

SERGEANT. What brought you here?

MAN. Sure, it's to the assizes I came, thinking I might make a few shillings here or there. It's in the one train with the judges I came.

SERGEANT. Well, if you came so far, you may as well go farther, for you'll walk out of this.

MAN. I will, I will; I'll just go on where I was going.

[*Goes towards steps.*

SERGEANT. Come back from those steps; no one has leave to pass down them to-night.

MAN. I'll just sit on the top of the steps till I see will some sailor buy a ballad off me that would give me my supper.



They do be late going back to the ship. It's often I saw them in Cork carried down the quay in a hand-cart.

SERGEANT. Move on, I tell you. I won't have anyone lingering about the quay to-night.

MAN. Well, I'll go. It's the poor have the hard life! Maybe yourself might like one, Sergeant. Here's a good sheet now. [*Turns one over.*] *Content and a Pipe*—that's not much. *The Peeler and the Goat*—you wouldn't like that. *Johnny Hart*—that's a lovely song.

SERGEANT. Move on.

MAN. Ah, wait till you hear it.

[*Sings :*

“ There was a rich farmer's daughter lived near the town of Ross;

She courted a Highland soldier, his name was Johnny Hart;
Says the mother to her daughter, ‘ I'll go distracted mad
If you marry that Highland soldier dressed up in Highland
plaid.’ ”

SERGEANT. Stop that noise.

[MAN *wraps up his ballads and shuffles towards the steps.*

SERGEANT. Where are you going?

MAN. Sure, you told me to be going, and I am going.

SERGEANT. Don't be a fool. I didn't tell you to go that way; I told you to go back to the town.

MAN. Back to the town, is it?

SERGEANT [*taking him by the shoulder and shoving him before him*]. Here, I'll show you the way. Be off with you. What are you stopping for?

MAN [*who has been keeping his eye on the notice, points to it*]. I think I know what you're waiting for, Sergeant.

SERGEANT. What's that to you?

MAN. And I know well the man you're waiting for—I know him well—I'll be going. [*He shuffles on.*]

SERGEANT. You know him? Come back here. What sort is he?

MAN. Come back is it, Sergeant? Do you want to have me killed?

SERGEANT. Why do you say that?

MAN. Never mind. I'm going. I wouldn't be in your shoes if the reward was ten times as much. [*Goes on off stage to L.*] Not if it was ten times as much.

SERGEANT [*rushing after him*]. Come back here, come back. [*Drags him back.*] What sort is he? Where did you see him?

MAN. I saw him in my own place, in the County Clare. I tell you you wouldn't like to be looking at him. You'd be afraid to be in the one place with him. There isn't a weapon he doesn't know the use of, and as to strength, his muscles are as hard as that board. [*Slaps barrel.*]

SERGEANT. Is he as bad as that?

MAN. He is then.

SERGEANT. Do you tell me so?

MAN. There was a poor man in our place, a sergeant from Ballyvaughan.—It was with a lump of stone he did it.

SERGEANT. I never heard of that.

MAN. And you wouldn't, Sergeant. It's not everything that happens gets into the papers. And there was a policeman in plain clothes, too. . . . It is in Limerick he was. . . . It was after the time of the attack on the police barrack at Kilmallock. . . . Moonlight . . . just like this . . . waterside. . . . Nothing was known for certain.

SERGEANT. Do you say so? It's a terrible country to belong to.

MAN. That's so, indeed! You might be standing there, looking out that way, thinking you saw him coming up this side of the quay [*points*], and he might be coming up this other side [*points*], and he'd be on you before you knew where you were.

SERGEANT. It's a whole troop of police they ought to put here to stop a man like that.

MAN. But if you'd like me to stop with you, I could be looking down this side. I could be sitting up here on this barrel.

SERGEANT. And you know him well, too?

MAN. I'd know him a mile off, Sergeant.

SERGEANT. But you wouldn't want to share the reward?

MAN. Is it a poor man like me, that has to be going the roads and singing in fairs, to have the name on him that he took a reward? But you don't want me. I'll be safer in the town.

SERGEANT. Well, you can stop.

MAN [*getting up on barrel*]. All right, Sergeant. I wonder, now, you're not tired out, Sergeant, walking up and down the way you are.

SERGEANT. If I'm tired I'm used to it.

MAN. You might have hard work before you to-night yet. Take it easy while you can. There's plenty of room up here on the barrel, and you see farther when you're higher up.

SERGEANT. Maybe so. [*Gets up beside him on barrel, facing right. They sit back to back, looking different ways.*] You made me feel a bit queer with the way you talked.

MAN. Give me a match, Sergeant [*He gives it and MAN lights pipe*]; takes a draw yourself? It'll quiet you. Wait now till I give you a light, but you needn't turn round. Don't take your eye off the quay for the life of you.

SERGEANT. Never fear, I won't. [*Lights pipe. They both smoke.*] Indeed it's a hard thing to be in the force, out at night and no thanks for it, for all the danger we're in. And it's little we get but abuse from the people, and no choice but to obey our orders, and never asked when a man is sent into danger, if you are a married man with a family.

MAN [*sings*]:

"As through the hills I walked to view the hills and
shamrock plain,
I stood awhile where nature smiles to view the rocks and
streams,
On a matron fair I fixed my eyes beneath a fertile vale,
As she sang her song it was on the wrong of poor old
Granuaile."

SERGEANT. Stop that; that's no song to be singing in these times.

MAN. Ah, Sergeant, I was only singing to keep my heart up. It sinks when I think of him. To think of us two sitting here, and he creeping up the quay, maybe, to get to us.

SERGEANT. Are you keeping a good look-out?

MAN. I am; and for no reward too. Amn't I the foolish man? But when I saw a man in trouble, I never could help trying to get him out of it. What's that? Did something hit me? [*Rubs his heart.*]

SERGEANT [*patting him on the shoulder*]. You will get your reward in heaven.



MAN. I know that, I know that, Sergeant, but life is precious.

SERGEANT. Well, you can sing if it gives you more courage.

MAN [*sings*] :

" Her head was bare, her hands and feet with iron bands
were bound,

Her pensive strain and plaintive wail mingles with the
evening gale,

And the song she sang with mournful air, I am old
Granuaile.

Her lips so sweet that monarchs kissed . . . "

SERGEANT. That's not it. . . . " Her gown she wore was
stained with gore." . . . That's it—you missed that.

MAN. You're right, Sergeant, so it is; I missed it.
[*Repeats line.*] But to think of a man like you knowing a
song like that.

SERGEANT. There's many a thing a man might know
and might not have any wish for.

MAN. Now, I dare say, Sergeant, in your youth, you
used to be sitting up on a wall, the way you are sitting up
on this barrel now, and the other lads beside you, and you
singing *Granuaile*? . . .

SERGEANT. I did then.

MAN. And the *Shan Bhean Bhocht*? . . .

SERGEANT. I did then.

MAN. And the *Green on the Cape*?

SERGEANT. That was one of them.

MAN. And maybe the man you are watching for to-night
used to be sitting on the wall, when he was young, and sing-
ing those same songs. . . . It's a queer world. . . .

SERGEANT. Whisht! . . . I think I see something coming. . . . It's only a dog.

MAN. And isn't it a queer world? . . . Maybe it's one of the boys you used to be singing with that time you will be arresting to-day or to-morrow, and sending into the dock. . . .

SERGEANT. That's true indeed.

MAN. And maybe one night, after you had been singing, if the other boys had told you some plan they had, some plan to free the country, you might have joined with them . . . and maybe it is you might be in trouble now.

SERGEANT. Well, who knows but I might? I had a great spirit in those days.

MAN. It's a queer world, Sergeant, and it's little any mother knows when she sees her child creeping on the floor what might happen to it before it has gone through its life, or who will be who in the end.

SERGEANT. That's a queer thought now, and a true thought. Wait now till I think it out. . . . If it wasn't for the sense I have, and for my wife and family, and for me joining the force the time I did, it might be myself now would be after breaking gaol and hiding in the dark, and it might be him that's hiding in the dark and that got out of gaol would be sitting up where I am on this barrel. . . . And it might be myself would be creeping up trying to make my escape from himself, and it might be himself would be keeping the law, and myself would be breaking it, and myself would be trying maybe to put a bullet in his head, or to take up a lump of a stone the way you said he did . . . no, that myself did. . . . Oh! [*Gasps. After a pause.*] What's that?
[*Gasps MAN'S arm.*]

MAN [*jumps off barrel and listens, looking out over water*].
It's nothing, Sergeant.

SERGEANT. I thought it might be a boat. I had a notion there might be friends of his coming about the quays with a boat.

MAN. Sergeant, I am thinking it was with the people you were, and not with the law you were, when you were a young man.

SERGEANT. Well, if I was foolish then, that time's gone.

MAN. Maybe, Sergeant, it comes into your head sometimes, in spite of your belt and your tunic, that it might have been as well for you to have followed Granuaile.

SERGEANT. It's no business of yours what I think.

MAN. Maybe, Sergeant, you'll be on the side of the country yet.

SERGEANT [*gets off barrel*]. Don't talk to me like that. I have my duties and I know them. [*Looks round.*] That was a boat; I hear the oars.

[*Goes to the steps and looks down.*]

MAN [*sings*]:

“ O, then, tell me, Shawn O'Farrell,
Where the gathering is to be.
In the old spot by the river
Right well known to you and me!”

SERGEANT. Stop that? Stop that, I tell you!

MAN [*sings louder*]:

"One word more, for signal token,
Whistle up the marching tune,
With your pike upon your shoulder,
At the Rising of the Moon."

SERGEANT. If you don't stop that, I'll arrest you.

[A whistle from below answers, repeating the air.]

SERGEANT. That's a signal. *[Stands between him and steps.]* You must not pass this way. . . . Step farther back.

. . . Who are you? You are no ballad-singer.

MAN. You needn't ask who I am; that placard will tell you. *[Points to placard.]*

SERGEANT. You are the man I am looking for.

MAN *[takes off hat and wig. SERGEANT seizes them]*. I am. There's a hundred pounds on my head. There is a friend of mine below in a boat. He knows a safe place to bring me to.

SERGEANT *[looking still at hat and wig]*. It's a pity! It's a pity. You deceived me. You deceived me well.

MAN. I am a friend of Granuaile. There is a hundred pounds on my head.

SERGEANT. It's a pity, it's a pity!

MAN. Will you let me pass, or must I make you let me?

SERGEANT. I am in the force. I will not let you pass.

MAN. I thought to do it with my tongue. *[Puts hand in breast.]* What is that?

Voice of POLICEMAN x outside. Here, this is where we left him.

SERGEANT. It's my comrades coming.

MAN. You won't betray me . . . the friend of Granuaile.

[Slips behind barrel.]

VOICE OF POLICEMAN B. That was the last of the placards.

POLICEMAN X *[as they come in]*. If he makes his escape, it won't be unknown he'll make it.

[SERGEANT puts hat and wig behind his back.]

POLICEMAN B. Did anyone come this way?

SERGEANT *[after a pause]*. No one.

POLICEMAN B. No one at all?

SERGEANT. No one at all.

POLICEMAN B. We had no orders to go back to the station; we can stop along with you.

SERGEANT. I don't want you. There is nothing for you to do here.

POLICEMAN B. You bade us to come back here and keep watch with you.

SERGEANT. I'd sooner be alone. Would any man come this way and you making all that talk? It is better the place to be quiet.

POLICEMAN B. Well, we'll leave you the lantern anyhow.

[Hands it to him.]

SERGEANT. I don't want it. Bring it with you.

POLICEMAN B. You might want it. There are clouds coming up and you have the darkness of the night before you yet. I'll leave it over here on the barrel. *[Goes to barrel.]*

SERGEANT. Bring it with you, I tell you. No more talk.

POLICEMAN B. Well, I thought it might be a comfort to you. I often think when I have it in my hand and can be



flashing it about into every dark corner [*doing so*] that it's the same as being beside the fire at home, and the bits of bogwood blazing up now and again.

[*Flashes it about, now on the barrel, now on*
SERGEANT.

SERGEANT [*furious*]. Be off, the two of you, yourselves and your lantern!

[*They go out. MAN comes from behind barrel. He*
and SERGEANT stand looking at one another.

SERGEANT. What are you waiting for?

MAN. For my hat, of course, and my wig. You wouldn't wish me to get my death of cold? [SERGEANT gives them.

MAN [*going towards steps*]. Well, good night, comrade, and thank you. You did me a good turn to-night, and I'm obliged to you. Maybe I'll be able to do as much for you when the small rise up and the big fall down . . . when we all change places at the Rising [*waves his hand and disappears*] of the Moon.

SERGEANT [*turning his back to audience and reading placard*]. A hundred pounds reward! A hundred pounds! [*Turns towards audience.*] I wonder, now, am I as great a fool as I think I am?

CURTAIN



HEWERS OF COAL

By JOE CORRIE



CHARACTERS

DICK, *a miner of middle age.*

BILLIE, *a boy of fifteen years.*

PETER, *a pit handyman, fifty years of age.*

JOE, *a miner of middle age.*

BOB, *a gaffer, fifty years of age.*



HEWERS OF COAL

SCENE. A 'heading' underground. It is a narrowly confined place about five feet six inches high, hewn out of the solid rock. A narrow strip of coal can be seen along the whole length of the back wall. A couple of props are at the back, a jacket hanging to a nail in one.

The only entrance is in the right (spectator's) wall. This is an opening about four feet high, and three and a half feet wide, with a prop at each side of it and one across the top. Over this opening there hangs a coarse and dirty canvas 'screen'—one of the underground precautions for a better air current. A few old hutch sleepers and pieces of prop lie here and there, on which the men sit when they are taking their meal.

When the curtain rises DICK sits in the centre eating bread and cheese from a 'piece-tin,' and drinking from a tea-flask. At his side there is a larger can which holds water. At right (spectator's) BILLY sits, also at his meal. They have been in the pit for three hours and their faces are black. Both have donned their coats, as is the custom in the mine when men are having their meal. Their safety lamps are beside them, but there should be a dim blue light added for stage purposes.

BILLIE, with his mouth full, puts his 'piece-tin' together and closes it with a snap. He puts it in his pocket as much as to say, 'Well, that's that.' DICK still taking his meal, looks round at BILLIE.

DICK. Finished with your meal already, Billie?

BILLIE [*still chewing*]. M-m!

DICK. You shouldn't eat so quick, lad, it isn't good for the stomach.

BILLIE. I've got a stomach that can digest nails . . . Peter's taking a long time to come in for his ham and egg.

DICK. There's a smash-up of hutches down the slope. Didn't you know that?

BILLIE. That's why the haulage was stopped before stopping time?

DICK. Yes. Some smash, too. Peter'll be cursing, for he doesn't care about losing sweat, the lazy . . .

[*The fact that BILLIE is a boy keeps him from expressing himself to the full.*]

BILLIE [*who has been eyeing DICK's tin*]. Is that scone you have with you?

DICK. Yes. [*Smiling.*] Want a bit?

[*BILLIE needs no second bidding. He is at DICK's side immediately. DICK, still smiling, hands him a piece of the scone. BILLIE takes a large bite.*]

BILLIE. Thanks, Dick—a million!

[*He returns to his former seat enjoying the scone to the full.*]

DICK. You seem to be fond of scone, Billie?

BILLIE. I could eat it till it was coming out o' my ears . . . It was a bad day for me when my mother died, Dick. [*Sighs.*] She used to bake scones every day.

DICK. Doesn't your sister do any baking?

BILLIE [*full of scorn*]. Her! She hasn't time to bake for powdering her face and waving her hair. Pictures and dancing, that's all *she* can think about. Mad to get a man, Dick, and when she does get one she'll poison him with tinned meat. I've got a new name for her now.

DICK [*amused*]. Oh, what have you christened her, Billie?

BILLIE [*with great satisfaction*]. Tin-opener Trixie. By gum! She's an expert at it. The back of our house is like munition works with empty tins.

DICK [*still amused*]. They tell me she's a champion dancer?

BILLIE. Dancer, yes, but it isn't round a baking-board. [*Pause.*] This scone is just great, Dick. You must be proud of your wife?

DICK [*suddenly thoughtful*]. Not as proud as I should be, perhaps . . . The miner is a thoughtless kind o' fellow, Bill. He goes home on pay day with about forty shillings, hands it over to the missus like a hero, forgetting that the Chancellor o' the Exchequer himself would have to throw in the sponge if he had to feed and clothe a man, a wife, and five kiddies on it. How the hell they manage to keep their head above water is a mystery to me . . . And yet they have the heart to laugh and sing, too.

BILLIE. My mother was always singing, Dick—always. [*With downcast eyes.*] By gum! I *do* miss her.

DICK. Is your father keeping better now?

BILLIE [*rather hopelessly*]. Some days he's all right, other days he's all wrong. I don't think he'll ever get right now.

DICK. You've had a rotten time, Billie, between one thing and another.

BILLIE. Father says that we're lucky with me working. It helps to keep us going. So I'll have to try and keep my job, Dick.

DICK [*thoughtfully*]. A job! . . . The whole world seems to go round on a job . . . No job, no bread—no bread, no laughter. [*Sighs.*] It's a strange way of running a world, in my opinion.

[*There is a slight pause. Then we hear a pony neighing outside. BILLIE looks at DICK quite tragically.*]

BILLIE. That's Danny . . . And I forgot to keep him a piece o' my bread.

DICK [*lightly*]. He has plenty of oats, Bill.

BILLIE. He looks forward now to getting a bit o' my bread and a drink o' my tea. [*Pony neighs again.*] He and I are great pals, Dick. If ever I win a big coupon I'm going to buy him from the company and take him up to the green fields. [*Pleadingly, in a way.*] It was greedy of me eating all my bread and not thinking o' Danny, wasn't it?

[*DICK holds out the last piece of scone he has left.*]

DICK. Take that out to him, Billie.

[*BILLIE immediately rises to get it.*]

BILLIE [*taking it*]. Dick, you're Public Hero Number One. [*He goes towards the exit.*]

DICK. Lift that screen, Billie, and give us a breath of air. It's beginning to suffocate in here.

[*While BILLIE is lifting the screen to hang it up the pony neighs again.*]

BILLIE. I'm coming, Danny—I'm coming!

[BILLIE goes off. DICK *wipes his brow with his fingers and throws the sweat off them. Then he takes a long breath or two of the air which seems to be coming in now. He closes his tin, and puts it and his tea-flask in his jacket pockets. PETER enters. He is in his shirt sleeves, rolled up and is wiping his brow with a red and white spotted handkerchief. DICK is conscious of his entrance but doesn't look at him. PETER speaks on entering and goes to his jacket, which is hanging on the prop. He rolls down his sleeves and speaks in DICK's direction.*

PETER. The things that happen down this pit would break the heart of a saint.

[*He takes his flask and tin from his pockets.*

DICK [*looking up at him unpleasantly*]. What's the matter with you?

PETER. Didn't you see that smash at the bottom o' the slope? Four hutches broke away from that last race and jammed themselves right up to the roof . . . Where's that boy?

DICK. What d'ye want with him?

PETER. The gaffer's coming up to speak to him about it. He put a coupling on twisted—that caused the break-away. I wouldn't be surprised if he gets the sack—Robert's flaming about it.

DICK. And how did Robert know it was a twisted coupling that caused the smash?

PETER. I told him.

DICK [*getting angry*]. * And how did you know?

PETER. Because it was the only way it *could* come off.

[PETER *sits at left to have his meal.*

DICK [*angry*]. You're damned ready at spotting things like that for the gaffer, aren't ye? D' you think he loves you for it?

PETER. Who are *you* barking at?

DICK. You! The lad wouldn't put a coupling on twisted intentionally, would he? Mistakes *will* happen. Have you never made one in your life?

PETER. If you saw the mess that I had to clear up you wouldn't be so damned kind.

DICK. Isn't your job in this pit to clear up messes? And, if you want my opinion, you're well suited to the job. Get what I mean?

PETER. Look here, Dick! If there's going to be any more o' this talk at meals I'm going to talk to the gaffer about it. I'm not going to stand insults from you.

DICK. If Billie gets the sack because o' this you'll have to stand a damned sight more than insults—I'll break your blasted neck.

PETER. It's no business o' yours, anyhow.

DICK. I'm *making* it my business. That lad can't afford to lose his job—it's the only thing between his family and starvation. Why did you tell the gaffer he was to blame?

PETER. If I had kept the blame off him it might have fallen on me.

DICK. Yes, and that would have been a hell of a tragedy, wouldn't it? You with your extra shifts and your ham and egg—you selfish swine!

PETER. If a man doesn't look after himself in this pit nobody else will.

DICK [*scornfully*]. Is that your outlook on life?

PETER. It is.

DICK. There might come a day, Peter, when you'll be depending on the help of someone. What'll you do then?

PETER. That day will *never* come—don't worry about that.

DICK. Better men than you have needed help, and have been damned glad to accept it when it *did* come.

PETER. Well, there's one thing you can be sure of, Dick. It'll be a bad day for me when I'm looking for help from *you*.

DICK. Don't boast, Peter. This is a strange world, remember, and some strange things happen in it.

PETER. That's *one* thing that'll never happen.

[BILLIE returns. He immediately sniffs and looks at PETER, who is now busy eating.]

BILLIE. There's a grand smell o' ham and egg in here.

DICK. Ten shifts a week and no kiddies to keep. Makes a difference, Billie.

[PETER glances unkindly at DICK for a moment, then looks at BILLIE.]

PETER [*to* BILLIE]. Did you see the gaffer out there?

BILLIE [*puzzled*]. No . . . What does he want with me?

DICK. You're getting the blame o' that smash.

BILLIE. Me? How?

PETER. You put a coupling on twisted and it came off going over the brow.

[BILLIE is troubled.]

BILLIE [*to DICK*]. Does that mean I'll get the sack?

DICK. If you have to go up the pit to-day, Bill, you won't be the only one.

BILLIE. What d'you mean, Dick?

DICK. Never mind just now . . . Doesn't Joe know it's stopping time?

BILLIE. He's not taking his food in here to-day.

DICK. Why not?

BILLIE. I don't know. He took his food into the coal-face this morning.

DICK. Go and give him a shout, anyhow, and make sure that he's all right.

[BILLIE goes off, giving PETER a nasty look as he goes.]

DICK. Billie's father's ill—you know that?

PETER. Well?

DICK. They're just scraping through on Billie's wage.

PETER. What has that to do with me?

DICK. You can tell the gaffer that you found a broken link on the slope, and that it caused the smash?

PETER. Yes, and if it was found out that I was telling the gaffer a lie it would mean the sack for me.

DICK. If Billie gets the sack because of this I'll—

[BOB enters. He is a tall man wearing short leggings. He hangs his lamp on his belt.]

BOB [*to PETER*]. There's a loose strand in that haulage rope. Get your splicing tools and run it in before starting-time.

[PETER immediately closes his tin, rises, and hurries off.]



PETER. I'll not be a minute, Robert . . . no more than a minute.

[PETER goes off. BOB takes a note-book and pencil from his pocket and writes something down.]

BOB. If it isn't one thing down here it's two. That's half an hour lost this morning.

DICK. Of course, a coal pit isn't like a biscuit works, Bob, where everything goes like a song?

BOB. There's too much carelessness. And I'm going to make an example this morning. Where's that pony driver?

DICK. He's in telling Joe Marshall to come in here for his meal.

BOB. Well, you can tell him not to start work until I speak to him.

DICK. Thinking of sacking him, are ye?

BOB. That smash was his fault and he'll have to pay for it.

DICK. Mistakes can happen with all of us, Bob.

BOB. We can't afford them happening with us.

DICK [*amused*]. We! Us! When did you get a share in the Imperial Coal Company, Bob?

[BOB looks at DICK quickly.]

BOB. What d'you mean?

DICK. You said 'we'—'us.' Only the directors speak in the plural.

BOB. Oh, being sarcastic, eh? Cut it out, Dick, or you might be getting more fresh air than is good for the health.

DICK. So you *do* know what fresh air is?

BOB. Eh?



DICK. We could be doing with a lot more of it down here.

BOB [*after looking at the entrance with the screen up*]. Seems to me you're getting a damned sight more than your share.

[*He goes to the entrance and lets the screen drop angrily.*]

DICK [*with a smile*]. It would be fine if everything in this pit could be remedied as easily as that, Bob—eh?

BOB. What are ye driving at?

DICK. Have you got that fall cleared up in the main air-course yet?

BOB. What the hell have you to do with the main aircourse?

DICK. I was just trying to get information.

BOB. Well, what'll happen to me if it isn't cleared up?

DICK. It isn't what'll happen to you—it's what'll happen to the lot of us. [*Significantly.*] There's no shortage o' gas down here, remember.

BOB [*with a sarcastic smile*]. Is that so?

DICK. There's a shortage o' props, a shortage o' air, but no shortage o' gas.

BOB [*thoughtfully*]. I see! . . . Dick, come into my office at finishing-time. I want a serious talk with you.

[*PETER returns carrying his splicing tools in his hand.*]

PETER. I'm ready, Robert.

[*BOB goes to the exit, stops and looks back at DICK.*]

BOB. Gas in the pit, is there? And a fall in the main aircourse. And you'd like the Government inspector to know



about it—eh? I have a way of dealing with your kind, Dick. Keep mind o' that.

[BOB goes off. PETER follows like a dog at the heels of its master. DICK smiles, but it is a troubled smile. BILLIE enters.]

BILLIE. Am I to get the sack, Dick?

DICK. Leave that to me, Bill . . . Is Joe coming in?

BILLIE. Yes. But he's had his meal, Dick; he took it at the coal-face.

DICK. He has never done that before.

BILLIE. He said he was too hungry to wait till stopping-time. [BILLIE sits.] If I get the sack I'll be afraid to go home, Dick.

DICK. If you get the sack to-day, Billie, I'll bring this bloody pit out on strike. And the company would have something to say about *that*.

[JOE enters. He doesn't look at all well, and has a racking cough.]

DICK. That cough o' yours is getting worse, Joe.

JOE [struggling for breath]. That air down there is killing me, Dick—killing me.

DICK. Why do you work in it?

JOE. I wouldn't if I could get out of it . . . But he knows he has me there, and won't give me another job . . . I wish to God I had never married, Dick—it has been hell ever since . . . being chained down here.

DICK. They know when they have a lever all right. [JOE sits where PETER was sitting.] Why didn't you take your breakfast with us?

JOE [guiltily]. I . . . took it early.



DICK. Why?

JOE. My place was on the move . . . and I had to come out to see if it would settle . . . And I can't get any wood to secure it. [*Hysterically.*] Dick! . . . I'm getting afraid to work in there. . . . It'll come down some day and crush me to pulp!

[*DICK is alarmed at this outburst. BILLIE just looks at JOE in a puzzled way. DICK goes to JOE.*]

DICK. Joe, you've got to pull yourself together, lad—you're letting your nerves get the better of ye.

JOE. But I can't help it! . . . I know it'll come down on me and . . .

DICK. I know what's the matter this morning, Joe. It's hunger. You didn't *bring* a meal with you this morning?

JOE. No, Dick, I . . . I . . .

DICK. It's all right Joe, you needn't be ashamed of it. It's no crime to come to the pit without bread when there's a wife and kiddies to come first. [*DICK looks at BILLIE.*] [*To BILLIE.*] Peter left a bit of his bread for the pony, didn't he?

BILLIE [*astounded*]. What, *he* did?

DICK [*nodding his head to BILLIE on the quiet*]. You were out at the time and didn't hear him . . . Danny has plenty of oats.

[*DICK lifts PETER'S bread tin, takes the bread from it, and pushes it into JOE'S hand. JOE shrinks from it.*]

JOE. No! . . . Peter would tell it all through the pit!

DICK [*forcing it into his hand*]. Take it and don't be a bloody fool! . . . I'll explain to Peter, and it'll be all right.

[JOE takes it, but reluctantly and ashamed.] If you don't want to take it here go into the coal-face and eat it.

[JOE looks at DICK in a hopeless manner.

JOE. Dick, I'm tired . . . I'm not fit enough now to be working here, but—there's nothing else for it . . . If that roof *would* come down and put an end to me Mary would get compensation, and her troubles would be all over.

DICK. Joe! Get that idea out of your head. That's the coward's way out . . . Go and eat that bread—it'll do you a world of good. [JOE rises and goes off slowly. We hear him coughing when he has gone.] Joe's just about a goner, I think.

BILLIE. Peter'll be mad when he finds his bread missing.

DICK [with a smile]. We'll blame it on the rats, Billie. He has enough ham and egg in him anyway to last him for the rest o' the shift. If he hasn't it'll do him good to feel hungry for once. [PETER returns hurrying and still cross.

PETER [entering]. It's little wonder my meals never do me any good. I never get peace to sit down to them. Always something going wrong. [He sits in his previous position. He lifts his tin, getting a shock at the lightness of it. He looks suspiciously at DICK. Then he opens the tin.] Here! What has happened to my bread?

DICK. A couple of rats came in and took it away, Peter.

PETER [sarcastically]. Oh, did they? Opened the lid, then shut it after them, eh?

DICK. Yes. They're getting more human down here every day. [PETER rises threateningly.

PETER. Where's my bread?

DICK [*to BILLIE*]. Doesn't believe a word I say nowadays, Billie.

PETER. I want that bread back—see!

DICK. Too late, Peter it's away ta-ta.

PETER. Where is it?

DICK. Well, Joe Marshall came in here and I discovered that he didn't bring a slice with him to the pit. So I thought you wouldn't mind him having what you had left.

PETER. What! You gave my bread away to him! . . . And what am I going to do now?

DICK. I think you had a good tightener.

[*PETER lifts his tin madly and raises it above DICK.*]

PETER. I'll bring this down on your blasted head, you. . .

[*DICK protects himself. BILLIE jumps. ROBERT enters.*]

BOB. What's the matter here?

[*PETER looks at BOB piteously.*]

PETER [*whining*]. Robert, he stole the bread from my tin when I was out and gave it away.

BOB [*puzzled*]. Stole your bread?

PETER. Stole it and gave it to Joe Marshall.

BOB [*to DICK*]. Is this true?

DICK. Joe came in here dead beat with hunger. I thought that Peter would be only too pleased to do a good turn to a mate for once in his life.

PETER [*still whining*]. He didn't even ask my permission, Robert . . . And here I am, left without a slice.

BOB. Dick, pack up your tools and get up the pit. [*To BILLIE.*] And you do the same.

DICK. Right-o! But before I *do* go I'm going to knock the head off this greedy swine.

[DICK *angrily divests himself of his jacket. BOB gets between him and PETER. PETER slinks back to a corner.*

BOB [to DICK]. You know what it means to strike a man down a pit!

DICK [making towards PETER, and trying to get past BOB]. I don't care! Joe was hungry, and . . .

[There is heard a terrific roar, like thunder. Immediately the quarrel is forgotten. Like trapped animals they instinctively herd together and rush to the left wall. BILLIE rushes to the shelter of DICK. The noise gets louder and more terrible. There is a pause, then JOE staggers in, falls, then crawls towards his mates.

JOE. We're trapped—trapped!

[The noise is now horrible, and the falling of debris is heard. A stone, accompanied by a cloud of dust, falls on the scene. A loud crash is heard at the entrance.

[Gradually the noise begins to fade, like thunder among the hills. Then quietness falls, save for the echo of falling debris in the working around.

[DICK goes cautiously to the entrance. He lifts the screen. They all give a start, for the way out is blocked by fallen stone. DICK turns and looks at his stricken mates.

DICK. God! . . . We're entombed!

A SLOW CURTAIN

THE SECOND SCENE

Immediately after the close of the curtain, through the darkness, we hear the voice of a wireless announcer.

ANNOUNCER. This is the National Programme . . . The deathroll in the Glendinning pit disaster has now reached forty-two, two other bodies having been found this morning. For the past five days the rescue parties have worked in relays, day and night. They are endeavouring now to reach the Hard Coal Heading, which, it is thought, a few of the men may have reached through old workings. Little hope, however, is being held of finding the men alive. Messages of sympathy have been received from His Majesty the King, the Prime Minister, the Minister for Mines, and the Archbishop of Cravenbury. A relief fund has been opened for the bereaved relatives to relieve the destitution, and contributions will be gratefully received at the office of the Miners' Federation, or may be sent to the Provost of Glendinning . . . In the South Wales coalfield another strike has broken out, the men claiming an increase of wages. The strike is entirely unofficial and . . .

[The last few words fade out as the curtain gradually opens.]

The scene is the old Hard Coal Heading. It is on a slope, rising from right to left. This can be done by using a sloped platform, a sloped frontpiece from about one foot at right to over two feet at left, with an irregular top edging to resemble coal. A black curtain can be lowered from the top at a corresponding angle.



There is a small opening at right, but it is only a hole big enough for a man to crawl through. It is no outlet to the world, as the workings around are all closed. The first thing to strike the eye will be five chalked strokes on the back wall.

There is only one lamp alight, hanging near DICK, who sits in the centre rather like a Rodin sculpture. BOB is at right on his knees, putting up a silent prayer. BILLIE lies asleep between BOB and DICK. JOE lies to left of DICK, also asleep, and looking deathly pale. PETER is at extreme left, looking hopelessly at the wall at left. They all wear their jackets, and it is easily seen that they are nearly done. It is the courage of DICK that has saved them up till now, that and the water-can which is close to DICK.

BOB [*just a faint whisper*]. Amen!

[*There is a dead pause for a moment or two. BOB looks at DICK pleadingly.*

BOB. Can I have a few drops o' water, Dick?

[*DICK slowly lifts the can to his ear and shakes it.*

DICK. It can only be a drop or two, Bob.

BOB. I know.

DICK. To-day'll finish it.

[*DICK hands the can over to BOB. PETER looks on the scene with staring eyes. While BOB sips, PETER begins to crawl towards him. DICK watches him closely. BOB hands the can back to DICK.*

PETER. Can I wet my tongue, too, Dick?

[DICK looks at JOE.]

DICK. I'm afraid we'll have to keep the rest for Joe . . . You've had your share to-day, Peter . . . I'm worried about Joe, he looks done for.

PETER [*piteously*]. Oh! . . . Just two drops, Dick—for God's sake!

[DICK is sorry for him.]

DICK. All right, but it must be your last—absolutely.

PETER. I know.

[DICK gives PETER the water-can, but holds on to it. He pulls it away when he thinks PETER has taken enough. PETER returns to his former position. There is a pause. Then BOB crawls to DICK and takes hold of his hand.]

BOB. Dick—before it is too late . . . Thanks for all you have done for us . . . It was your pluck that got us here . . . your hope that has kept us alive . . . if it has failed . . . Oh!

DICK. It might have been better if we had stayed where we were—it would have been all over now . . . But life is sweet . . . Still, we know each other better now—and that's something.

BOB. Yes, but it's a pity we don't know more of the good things in life until it's too late.

[BOB returns to his former position. There is a pause.]

BOB [*hopelessly*]. Not a sound—anywhere!

DICK [*quickly*]. Listen! [DICK, PETER, and BOB are all attention to listen. After a pause, hopelessly.] No!

BOB. No!

PETER. No!

BOB. Strange that the hunger has passed away.

DICK [*with a faint smile*]. It was hellish while it lasted . . . No craving for food now—just water.

PETER [*a sudden outburst, wildly*]. I'm burning inside like a fire—roasting! [*He makes a sudden attempt to get the water-can. DICK gets hold of it. BOB is prepared to defend DICK. Madly.*] Give me that water! . . . Give me that water—or I'll kill ye!

[BOB lifts a stone from the floor and raises it above his head.]

BOB. Touch that water, and it'll be your last.

DICK [*who is really master of the situation*]. Bob! No temper. [PETER goes back to his place.]

PETER. Oh, this is unbearable—unbearable! [*Then in desperation he beats his hands against the wall.*] Help! Help! Help!

DICK. Cut that out! D'ye want to waken the kid?

[PETER sinks exhausted. BOB and DICK both look at the sleeping boy.]

BOB. Hasn't he been plucky, Dick?

DICK. Plucky? By God, he has!

PETER [*very slowly*]. Oh! this waiting—waiting on something that can never happen now . . . waiting!

DICK. Listen! [*Again they are all attention. There is a slight pause.*] No!

BOB [*very tired*]. Imagination again . . . I wonder what has been happening? . . . How many have lost their lives? . . . And they'll be blaming me! [*Hysterically.*] They'll be blaming me!

PETER [*also hysterical*]. And you *were* to blame! . . . The main aircourse was never kept clear.

DICK. We were all to blame for something. If it wasn't greed and selfishness, it was fear and cowardice . . . Thinking only of ourselves, and the others could go to hell. [*to BOB.*] And what has it been worth to-day?

BOB. If I live to come through this I'll be a different man, Dick.

DICK. We'll all be different men, I think.

[*There is a silence. Then JOE begins to rave in his delirium.*]

JOE. Three hundred quid! . . . She'll get three hundred quid! . . . Mary, tell the kiddies that you'll get three hundred quid.

[*JOE laughs very weakly. The others look at him in suspense and fear.*]

BOB [*in a whisper*]. He's started again.

DICK [*to BOB*]. Is he too weak now to go mad?

PETER [*hysterically*]. Mad! . . . Oh, my God, we'd have to kill him!

DICK. Peter, haven't you got one single kind thought in that miserable heart o' yours? In a short time we'll all be knocking at the door of Kingdom Come. Let's go with clean hands and hearts. [PETER is ashamed.]

JOE. Three hundred quid of compensation—the price of a dead miner! Three hundred quid, Mary, and—a corpse . . . Ha, ha!

PETER. I can't stand this, I tell ye!—I can't!

[Again he beats his hands against the stone wall of his prison. Then he gives it up in absolute despair. There is another silence. BILLIE begins to talk in his sleep. DICK and JOE look at him.]

BILLIE. Mother! . . . Mother! . . . Dick says that I've been brave . . . You always told me to play the man . . . Dick says I've been great . . . Danny was killed . . . my pony . . . We were great pals, mother.

DICK. Plucky kid! *[Softly.]* Sleep, Billie . . . sleep.

[A silence.]

JOE. And Peter grudged me his bit o' bread . . . *[PETER rises as if his conscience had stricken him.]* And I was hungry . . . Oh, I was hungry . . .

PETER *[piteously]*. I didn't grudge him my bread, Dick, did I?

DICK. No, Peter, it was all a mistake. You were angry because I didn't ask your permission. Forget about it.

JOE. Three hundred quid! . . .

[JOE tries to sing a word or two of Love's Old Sweet Song, but he only gets a few notes out when he stops exhausted. There is a pause.]

BOB *[quietly]*. The sun! . . . Just to look up again at the sky! To walk through the woods! . . . To climb the hills! . . . To lie down and drink the clear, cold water! *[The mention of water makes PETER rise again and cast an envious eye on the water-can. DICK holds it tightly to himself.]* Five days in hell! And every day an eternity.

DICK. Give me your book and pencil, Bob. I'm going to write to Elsie again. [BOB gives him the book and pencil. DICK begins to write, after counting the chalk marks on the wall. Slowly as he writes.] Friday—the fifth day . . . Water now finished—keeping a drop for Joe . . . Billie sleeps—Joe very weak . . . Last lamp now burning . . . Still—hoping . . . Don't worry . . . Good night, Elsie . . . Kiss the kids for me. [Overcome.] Oh! merciful Christ!

[This outburst brings both BOB and PETER to attention, for it is the first.

BOB [quickly]. Dick, for God's sake don't let yourself go like that! Don't let us down now.

[DICK raises his head, and smiles.

DICK. I'm sorry . . . It was the thought of the kiddies.

[He tears the leaf from the book, and puts it in his breast-pocket. He gives BOB the book and pencil. BOB begins writing his letter.

[JOE opens his eyes and stares blankly round the cavern. Gradually he realizes where he is.

JOE. Dick . . . can I have a drop o' water—water?

DICK. Sure, Joe. [DICK goes to him with the can.] Have you had a good sleep?

JOE. Yes . . . I don't know . . .

[He tries to put his hand to his head but is too weak.

DICK holds the water-can to JOE'S lips. PETER keeps looking at JOE in an attitude of fear. DICK lets JOE have all the water save for a drop or two which he is keeping for BILLIE. He returns to his seat with the can. JOE looks at PETER.

JOE. Peter—I didn't eat *your* bread. [*They are all surprised at this.*] I didn't eat it . . . I put it in my box for the kids . . . and it was buried . . . buried in the fall. [DICK and BOB exchange glances. JOE tries to laugh, but only coughs.] Dick, I'm done for.

DICK. No fear, Joe. You'll live to sing a song yet on the Saturday night—eh?

JOE. Saturday—pay-day—bread—and margarine. Ha, ha!

PETER. I didn't grudge you my bread, Joe, I . . . didn't.

JOE. I'm cold . . . cold.

[PETER, to the surprise of DICK and BOB, feels JOE'S hand.

PETER [*softly*]. Cold!

[*He takes off his jacket and puts it over JOE. DICK nods his head to BOB in a well-pleased manner. There is a short pause, then PETER returns to his corner. DICK looks at the lamp.*

DICK. That lamp can't burn much longer . . . We should put it out and save it.

BOB. No! I couldn't face the dark!

PETER. You might not get it to light again!

DICK. Well, when it does go out, we'll know that the end *has* come.

[BILLIE raises his head, opening, and rubbing his eyes. He looks all round him, then sinks down again with a little cry of hopelessness.

DICK [*comforting* BILLIE]. You told your mother that you had been a man, Billie . . . That's the spirit, my lad.

You're made of the right stuff. I kept the last of the water for you, Billie. Have it now?

BILLIE. Yes. [*He sits up and DICK lets him drain the can. The others hopelessly watch it go down.*] Anybody been here, Dick?

DICK. Not yet, Bill, but they'll be here soon now.

BOB [*to BILLIE*]. How d'you feel, Billie?

BILLIE. Okay!

BOB. You're a great little fellow.

BILLIE. You won't give me the sack now, Bob?

[*He smiles, having now no fear of the gaffer.*]

BOB. I'll never give any one the sack now, Billie—I'm through with gaffering. [*BILLIE looks up at the lamp suddenly. All look.*]

BILLIE. That lamp's going down!

[*It is flickering slightly. All stare at it tragically. There is a profound silence.*]

JOE [*very quietly*]. Three hundred quid. And I thought I was only worth a few shillings. Ha!

BILLIE [*looking at JOE half in fear*]. What's wrong with Joe, Dick?

DICK. Just dreaming, Billie.

BILLIE. But his eyes are open—look!

DICK [*to take BILLIE's attention off JOE*]. Shall we have another little sing-song—eh! . . . What'll we sing this time? . . . Our favourite again . . . One—two: [*Sings.*]

Speed, bonnie boat, like a bird on the wing,
Onward, the sailors cry,
Carry the lad that's born to be king,
Over the sea to Skye.!

[BILLIE joins JOE, then BOB, then PETER. It is a terrible struggle for them to sing, and the tune is just recognizable but no more. They are all affected by it, as they feel that it is the last song that will ever come from their lips.

[They are near the end of the verse when DICK stops suddenly and listens. The others do the same.

DICK. Listen [DICK lifts a piece of stone from the floor and taps with it steadily for a few moments on the rock bottom.] Listen! [They put their ears to the floor. Through the stillness we can hear a very faint tapping away somewhere in the distance. DICK rises first.] It's the rescue party—we're saved! We're saved. [They just look at each other in dumb amazement.

BILLIE. Mother! Mother!

DICK. Sing like hell! . . . They must hear us! . . . Sing! . . . Sing! [A superhuman strength possesses them now. They sing quite loudly, looking left. DICK stops and holds his hands for silence. They listen breathlessly. Far away we can hear the rescue party singing the same song.] They've heard us! Shout! . . . Hooray! . . . Hooray! [They all shout with the exception of JOE who is still motionless.] Elsie! . . . Elsie! . . . We're saved . . . [Overcome with the excitement he shakes JOE to waken him.] Joe! . . . Joe! . . . They're here at last . . . They're quite near! . . . They've heard us! . . . We're . . . [He stops suddenly.] My God!

[BOB, DICK, and PETER exchange glances. BILLIE is puzzled.

DICK [to keep the truth from BILLIE]. We'll just let him sleep, Bob.



BOB. All right.

[*There is a pause, then DICK removes his cap. BOB follows suit, then PETER. BILLIE watches them and does likewise. The lamp flickers more now and will soon be out. In the distance we can hear the tapping of the rescuers, still singing the song.*]

THE CURTAIN FALLS SLOWLY

14. 9. 55.